

THE
CELEBRATION OF
THE ORDINARY

THE SPIRITANS
1703-2003



SPIRITANS
ONE HEART. ONE SPIRIT

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DAVID L. SMITH, C.S.Sp., Ph.D.



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THE CELEBRATION OF THE ORDINARY



WITH THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

300TH SPIRITAN ANNIVERSARY

PRAYER FOR THE SPIRITAN YEAR

HOLY SPIRIT, YOU ARE CALLING US TO SEIZE THIS FAVORABLE TIME TO RENEW OURSELVES IN OUR SPIRITAN LIFE AS WE CELEBRATE THE MEMORY OF 300 YEARS SINCE OUR FOUNDATION AND THE CHARISM PASSED ON TO US BY OUR PREDECESSORS:

MAY YOUR GIFTS OF STRENGTH AND WISDOM HELP US TO DEEPEN OUR SERVICE TO THE POOR;

MAY YOUR GIFTS OF HUMILITY AND DEVOTION HELP US TO LIVE OUR RELIGIOUS LIFE TO THE FULL;

MAY YOUR GIFTS OF INTELLIGENCE AND DISCERNMENT HELP US TO RECOGNIZE WHAT YOU ARE CALLING US TO DO AT THIS TIME;

AND BY THE FIRE OF YOUR LOVE, ENKINDLE IN US THAT MISSIONARY ENTHUSIASM WHICH FILLED YOUR APOSTLES FROM THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

AMEN

THE CELEBRATION OF THE ORDINARY

**THE SPIRITANS
1703-2003**

**Edited with an Introduction by
David L. Smith, C.S.Sp., Ph.D.**

**Spiritus Press
Bethel Park, PA**

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* Reprinted from Koren: H. (1958) The Spiritans: A History of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, Chapter I, The Founder and His Work. Duquesne U. Press, Pittsburgh, PA.

* Reprinted from Hanley, B. (n.d.) Francis Libermann: To the Ends of the Earth, in the “Anthonian”

DEDICATION AND APPRECIATION

I would like to dedicate this volume of essays to the thousands of Spiritans who have served the poor and abandoned in our works throughout the world over these past 300 years. In a very special way, it is dedicated to the thousands of Spiritans who labored on the continent of Africa to serve the "Poor Blacks" for whom the heart of Libermann burned with an intense zeal. In his typical prophetic style, he wrote of justice and equality for all without fear of the established powers of this world.

If we had been able to start a mission in Haiti, we would have destroyed the ridiculous prejudices which have fed the ambitions and interests of a handful of men to the detriment of millions of souls created in the image of God and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. I am convinced that our success would have been complete and we would have been able to show the detractors of the black race that not having white skin does not mean that they are less the children of God than themselves, that they have the same nobility of soul and are just as capable of accepting faith and morality. In short, colour does not in any way denote inferiority. (Libermann to M. Percin, 1846, cited in Spiritan Anniversary Diary (1703-2003), 2002, p. 377).

This volume is also dedicated to all the Spiritans who, since the founding of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, have devoted their lives to the work of education and have been loyal to the mandate of Libermann to be "the advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the weak and little ones against all who oppress them" (Rule of 1848, cited in the Spiritan Rule of Life, p. 21). When our holy Founder,

Claude Poullart des Places opened the House of the Holy Spirit in Paris on Pentecost Sunday (1703), it was for the purpose of educating "Poor Scholars" for the priesthood; young men who in turn would prepare other poor young men for the same vocation. Today, on every continent, in some form or other, our Spiritan confreres are engaged in works of education for the liberation of the poor and oppressed.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this volume of essays to Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit, which is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year. In a particular way, the book is dedicated to all the Spiritans who established the University in 1878 and continue to sponsor and serve it. With the zeal of their Founders, they strive to preserve the original inspiration of the Congregation by promoting the values of the Founders as they were reaffirmed by the General Chapter of the Congregation at Itaici, Brazil in 1992.

We thank God that identification with the people we serve is nothing new to the Congregation. The stories we heard at Itaici show that this sharing of the lot of people, in good times and bad, is still the ideal of Spiritans throughout the world. The present commitments of some of our confreres represent a real struggle as they question deep-rooted mentalities, structures and vested interests. (cited in Spiritan Anniversary Diary (1703-2003), 2002, p.21).

It is the proud mission of the Spiritans of Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit to educate their students to enter into the world prepared to seek the liberation of humanity from injustice, poverty and ignorance by transforming the structures and systems which violate the dignity and freedom of the human person.

I would like to express my personal appreciation to Virginia Sedor who supervised the preparation of the text and to Mary Winkler who organized and typed the text so

expertly and expeditiously. A sincere word of thanks is also due to my Research Assistant, Daniel Martino, who proofed and polished my own essay as well as the bibliography.

PREFACE

In the year of Our Lord, 2003, the Spiritans of the USA-East Province of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit under the protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary celebrate with joy and hope two memorable anniversaries. It is the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Congregation by Claude Francis Poullart des Places in 1703, and it is the 125th anniversary of Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit founded by his Spiritans (sons, followers, heirs) in 1878. There will be many events to honor and commemorate these anniversaries. Splendid as these events may be, they are by nature transitory, subject to the flow of time. With this collection of essays on the Spiritan founders and their spirituality, a more permanent record of these anniversaries can be inscribed in the world.

The context for the three essays by the Duquesne University theologians was provided by the dawning of the new millennium. To prepare the world for the birth of the 21st century of Christian history, Pope John Paul II, on November 10, 1994 issued an Apostolic Letter, *On the Coming of the Third Millennium (Tertio Millennio Adveniente)*. He began: “As The Third Millennium of the new era draws near, our thoughts turn spontaneously to the words of the Apostle Paul: ‘When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman’ (*Gal 4:4*).” The Pope continues to quote St. Paul several times. “Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’” “His conclusion is truly comforting,” the Pope writes, “So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir” (*Gal 4:6-7*).

Paul’s presentation of the mystery of the Incarnation contains *the revelation of the mystery of the Trinity and the continuation of the Son’s mission in the mission of the Holy*

Spirit. The Incarnation of the Son of God, his conception and birth, is the prerequisite for the sending of the Holy Spirit. This text of Saint Paul *thus allows the fullness of the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation to shine forth.* (pp. 3-4)

The Pope's Apostolic Letter went on to solemnly proclaim the year 2000 as a Year of Jubilee. It was his intention that the Jubilee would be "a great *prayer of praise and thanksgiving*, especially for the *gift of the Incarnation of the Son of God and of the Redemption* which he accomplished" (p. 41). The Pope then designated a span of three years to prepare for this great Jubilee of the new millennium. Year one (1997) was to be dedicated to "*reflection on Christ.*" Year two (1998) was dedicated "to the *Holy Spirit* and to his sanctifying presence within the Community of Christ's disciples." Finally "*1999, the third and final year of preparation*, will be aimed at broadening the horizons of believers, so that they will see things in the perspective of Christ: *in the perspective of the 'Father who is in heaven'...*" (p. 61).

In August of 1997, a Spiritan confrere died. His name was Father Edward L. Murray, C.S.Sp. For over thirty years he had dedicated his life to Duquesne University as a priest, professor and psychotherapist. In 1998, the year of the Holy Spirit, the three papers in this collection by M. Baird, W. Thompson-Uberuaga and G. Worgul were delivered in his honor devoted to the theme the Holy Spirit and spirituality. The fourth essay was written especially for this collection by D. Smith, C.S.Sp. to celebrate the two anniversaries. To place the four essays in context it seemed proper to provide sketches of the lives of the two spiritual masters, Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann, whose own lives and noble spirits gave life to the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and through the Congregation brought forth Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit. Once again in these

two great organizations we see verified, *Spiritus est qui vivificat*, it is the Spirit who gives life.

REFERENCE

Pope John Paul II. *On the coming of the third millennium (Tertio millennio adveniente) Apostolic letter issued on November 10, 1994*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

CONTRIBUTORS

Marie L. Baird, Ph.D. is associate professor of theology at Duquesne University. Her research interests include the theology of suffering, the philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas and Eric Voegelin, Christian spirituality and mysticism, and the role of ethics in theology and spirituality after the Holocaust. She has given papers on these topics at national and international conferences. She has also published a number of articles devoted to these topics in scholarly journals such as the *Journal of Religion, Philosophy and Theology*, *Louvain Studies*, and the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. The title of her recently published book is *On the Side of the Angels: Ethics and Post-Holocaust Spirituality* (Peeters, 2002).

Boniface F. Hanley, O.F.M. has had a long and richly varied ministry as a Franciscan priest for over fifty years. He has several in religious formation, pastoral and scholarly work. His books include *Franciscans – Love at Work*; *Ten Christians*, 1979; *No Greater Love*, 1982, *No Strangers to Love, No Strangers to Violence*, 1983; *With Minds of Their Own*, 1991; and *Francis Libermann: To the Ends of the Earth*, (n.d.).

Henry J. Koren, C.S.Sp., S.T.D. was a native of Holland and a member of the Spiritans for many years prior to his death on February 8, 2002. He earned a doctorate from the Gregorian University. He served as chair of the departments of philosophy and psychology. He also served as director of the Duquesne University Press, and by inviting Continental scholars to the University, he promoted major programs in Continental thought as well as editing and publishing numerous books in this area. He was also renowned as a prolific historian of the Spiritan founders and the works of the Congregation. He continued his scholarly activities as archivist of the Province until the time of his death.

David L. Smith, C.S.Sp., Ph.D. has been a Spiritan for fifty years. He did his theological studies at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland and his graduate studies in psychology at Duquesne University and the University of Montreal. He is currently the executive director of the Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, Gumberg Library, Duquesne University and author of *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: The History of Duquesne University's Graduate Psychology Programs (1959-1999)* (Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, 2002).

William M. Thompson-Uberuaga, Ph.D. is professor of philosophical and systematic theology at Duquesne University. He specializes in the interface between theology and philosophy, especially political theory. He is the author of numerous articles in scholarly journals and his most recent book is *The Struggle for Theology's Soul: Contesting Scripture in Christology* (Crossroad, 1996). He is a past president of the Catholic Theological Society of America and serves on the editorial boards of *Theological Studies and Horizons*.

George S. Worgul, Jr., S.T.D., Ph.D. is professor of systematic theology and associate director of The Family Institute at Duquesne University. He received his Ph.D. in religious studies and the S.T.D. in systematic theology from the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium (K.U.L.). He is the author of *From Magic to Metaphor: A Validation of Christian Sacraments* (Paulist Press, 1980). Dr. Worgul has also edited *Issues in Academic Freedom* (Duquesne University Press, 1992).

CHAPTER ONE

THE LIFE AND WORK OF POULLART DES PLACES

Henry J. Koren, S.T.D., C.S.Sp.

Biographical Sketch of Father Claude Poullart des Places

Claude Francis Poullart des Places was born in Rennes, Brittany, on February 26, 1679.¹ His father, one of the richest

¹ The traditional date is February 21. However, the original baptismal record, dated February 27, clearly states that Claude was born on February 26. This document bears the signature of several persons of high standing in addition to that of the priest who performed the baptism. It is unlikely that such a solemn memorial would be mistaken about the date of Claude's birth. We transcribe here the text and its translations:

Claude françois né du jour d'hiers fils de n(oble) h(omme) claude françois poullart, ad(vocat) en la cour et d(emoiselle) Jannes (Le) Meneust sa compagne s(ieur) et dame des Places a été Baptisé en cette Eglize par n(oble) et d(iscret) M(essire) Julien Roussigneul R(ector) d'icelle et tenu sur les S(aint)s fonds baptismaux par haut et puissant Seig (neu)r Messire Claude de Marbeuf Chevallier Seig (neu)r de L'Aille, du gué et autres lieux, Con(seille)r du Roy en ses conseils et president de son parlement de Bretagne, parrain et demoiselle Françoise, Truillot dame de ferret marraine, lesquels ont signé ce Jour vingt et septiesme de fevrier mil six cent soixante et dix neuf, avec plusiers autres personnes de qualité.

Claude Francis, born yesterday, the son of nobleman Claude Francis Poullart, lawyer at the Court, and Madame Jeanne Le Meneust, his spouse, Lord and Lady des Places, has been baptized in this church by the noble and illustrious Sir Julian Roussigneul, its Rector. He was held over the holy baptismal font by the exalted and puissant Lord, Sir Claude de Marbeuf, Lord of Laille, Gué, and other places, member of the King's Council, President of

merchants in the town² and a respected lawyer in the Sovereign Parliament of Brittany, stemmed from a family that proudly traced its patents of nobility back to the Middle Ages. His mother, also of noble lineage, was the daughter of a prosperous businessman.³

Claude's earliest years were blessed by a careful and pious upbringing at home. At the age of eight he was enrolled as a day-student in the famous Jesuit Academy at Rennes. Aside from the remarkable intelligence which he displayed from the very inception of his schooling, this bright little boy revealed a phenomenal degree of religious zeal by quietly organizing some of his fellow pupils into a society whose members devoted their free time to prayer, penance, and devotional exercises.

At the amazingly early age of twelve he had already finished the classical course, but since everyone felt that he was too young to start studying philosophy, his parents sent him to the College of Caen to take an advanced course in

his Parliament in Brittany, Godfather; and Madame Francoise Truillot, Lady of Ferret, Godmother, who together with several other persons of quality have affixed their signatures this day, February the twenty-seventh, 1679.

(signed) Claude de Marbeuf (President of the Parliament)

Françoise Truillot (Lady of Ferret)

(Claude) de Marbeuf (Abbot of Langonnet)

F. Thounenin, Marie Le Gouverneur, Francois Gouyan de Beaucorps, Gillette Lexot, Ferret, J. Roussigneul, Rector of St. George.

² The size of his fortune may be gauged from the fact that at his daughter's marriage in 1705 he gave her a dowry of one hundred thousand livres plus ten thousand livres worth of silverware and furniture. For purposes of comparison at present day values, two thousand livres were considered adequate compensation for maintaining a noble family with their coachmen and servants for a period of six months.

³ Claude had two younger sisters, one of whom died in infancy.

oratory, a discipline for which he appeared to be especially gifted. As at Rennes, Claude distinguished himself among the two thousand students of this college also by his piety as well as by his success in the strenuous studies to which his young mind was subjected. At the conclusion of this interlude, he returned to Rennes for a two-year course in philosophy.

It was during this time that he became the intimate friend of a boy, six years older than he, who was destined to make history in the Church under the name of St. Louis Mary Grignion de Montfort, the apostle of Mary and the founder of at least two religious orders: the Society of Mary and the Daughters of Wisdom. The two boys had been classmates all through their classical studies, but at that time they knew each other only superficially as close competitors for first place in examinations. Now that Claude had reached the age of thirteen and was giving evidence of a maturity that would have done credit to a much older boy, it did not take the two very long to realize how much they had in common. As they joined in prayer and pious works, the future apostle of Mary kindled in the heart of his young companion that flame of great devotion to the Blessed Virgin which was to remain burning forever in his soul and which prompted him later to add her Immaculate Conception to the title of his Congregation.

This pious association with the future saint should not lead us to believe that Claude was a shy and withdrawn youngster who loved to be alone with his thoughts or to share them only with a favored few. Although he practiced penance to the extent of giving up wine altogether - which in a Frenchman would be comparable to an American boy's forsaking ice cream and soft drinks - he liked company and pleasure. In fact, he looked forward with enthusiasm to the long vacations away from school, for it was during those months of leisure that his parents did their best to endow him with every social refinement one would expect of a member of the city's leading family. Travel, marksmanship, riding,

hunting, and dancing constituted his favorite recreational activities during these carefree days.

He especially loved play-acting and had a real talent for dramatic activities. On one occasion this penchant for drama nearly resulted in very real tragedy. While he was earnestly trying to study an assigned role, his little sister kept teasing him with childish interruptions. At length, he threatened her with what he thought was an empty gun and pulled the trigger. The household was terrified when a bullet passed between his sister and his mother, missing their heads by a few inches! The careless use of firearms appears not to have been unusual in those days for, on another occasion while Claude was hunting with a few friends, he was felled by a shot in the abdomen from a distance of ten feet. Divine Providence evidently wanted to save him for his future work for when his frightened comrades rushed to the prostrate body they found that he had sustained only a superficial wound.

Aside from vacation periods, however, Claude studied seriously and with great success. Although he was the youngest of all, he placed first among the hundreds of students who took the final examination at Rennes. For that reason he was chosen to be the defendant in the customary philosophical debate at the end of the academic year in 1694. At the time, such disputes were held with much more solemnity than obtains nowadays in seminaries where the custom still survives. Weeks beforehand the theses were advertised in detail on billboards throughout the city, invitations were sent to learned societies, and no expense was spared to make the assembly as solemn as possible. The pageantry of these sessions surpassed by far the color and solemnity that attends commencement exercises in modern American universities. Along with the full faculty and student body, kings and nobles, members of Parliament, bishops and canons, and cultured society in general came to these affairs and took an active part in the argument.

On Claude's big day everything took place with the customary pomp and ceremony. Dedicating his defense to

the King's son, Louis de Bourbon, the fifteen-year old boy thrilled and charmed his audience by the clarity and simplicity of his replies, the breadth and depth of his knowledge, the charm of his youth and the grace of his eloquence. With little or no help from his professor, he deftly disposed of his opponents by a shattering display of logic. Then, as the thunderous applause died down around him, this stage of Claude's career came to a brilliant and memorable end.

Exceptionally intelligent, charming in manner, handsome, richly endowed with material goods, universally beloved, he had the world at his feet. Now it was time for him, his parents thought, to enter society, relax from the drudgery of seven years' intensive study, and become an "accomplished gentleman." In a city which feverishly tried to emulate the social amenities of Paris, invitation followed invitation: a party here, a banquet there, the chase, the concert, the ball, the theater – every host and hostess clamored for his company.

It would be dishonest to pretend that Claude did not feel deeply gratified by all this adulation and that he spurned the pleasures held out to him on all sides. In fact, his earlier thoughts about becoming a priest seemed at this point to have faded completely from his mind. Highly pleased with himself and his achievements, he began to look around for a career that would offer him a chance to fulfill his ambitions for more honor and glory. To this end, friends of the family suggested that it might be advantageous to attach the young man to the Versailles Court in the service of the Duke of Burgundy, grandson of King Louis XIV. The marvelous defense of his theses had already attracted the Court's attention.⁴ There was nothing left but to arrange for Claude's

⁴ This may seem unlikely in our days. Yet in those times intense interest was displayed in these tourneys of the mind. One of the reasons why Emperor Charles IV founded the University of Prague was his desire to have similar intellectual duels in that city.

marriage to one of the Princess's ladies-in-waiting in order to assure such a position for this promising scion of an ancient and noble line.

Claude traveled by coach to Paris where he took up residence with friends of the family. As soon as he arrived, the best drawing rooms of the capital quickly opened their doors to him and before long he was presented to the Duke of Burgundy at the Court of Versailles. The splendor of the court made a deep impression on him and he would have been glad to plunge into its endless round of glittering events but for the fact that the proposed marriage was not to his liking. As his first biographer expresses it: "He passionately desired glory and renown. But becoming involved with a woman in marriage was an obstacle rather than a means to the attainment of such a goal." Moreover, his lordly old father did not relish the idea of Claude's "spending his life in antechambers, courtyards and staircases." He wanted something better for this son of whom he was immensely proud. As a result, it was decided that Claude should leave the Court, at least for a while.

The sacrifice was a painful one because he realized that, with his talents and charm, success would not have been slow in coming. Somewhat reluctantly he returned to the less glamorous surroundings of provincial Rennes to start once more on the old routine of parties and social affairs. After all, he was the son of the richest man in town, and what else could be expected? Although his parents provided him with a generous allowance for his social life, Claude wanted only the best of the best, and the best costs a great deal of money. Soon he had to resort to borrowing to keep abreast of the mounting bills, meanwhile engaging in all kinds of camouflage to hide his insolvency from his father who, he was well aware, would have strongly disapproved of such prodigality.

Qualms of conscience began to follow these financial worries. Although the piety of his early youth had safeguarded him thus far from the dangerous pitfalls so common in a life of this sort, Claude felt ill at ease. He

realized that he was no longer as intimately united with God as before. With a feeling of longing his thoughts returned to the days when all his young heart desired was God and God alone. He who had thought of becoming a priest was now rapidly drifting closer to the raging torrent of pride and worldly concupiscence, and this uneasiness induced him to make a retreat to examine his conscience and decide what to do with his life.⁵

During those days of recollection he saw how unfaithful he had been to grace and how much he had exposed himself to the danger of sin. He again felt the call to God's service. Now he was going to become a great preacher for God. In his imagination he saw his pulpit surrounded by thousands of entranced listeners, swayed by his powerful eloquence and eager to return to their Heavenly Father. He would study theology at the Sorbonne, renew there his academic triumphs, and then begin the conversion of France. Sincere as his desire was for the priesthood, he did not realize how much his ambition for personal glory played a part in these dreams. Nonetheless, he at last decided to confide the plan to his doting father.

It was a rude shock for the man who had pinned on this only son all his worldly dreams of glory and renown for the des Places family, but he was too good a Christian to oppose the idea openly. Instead of antagonizing Claude and thus strengthening his resolve, the father thought it would be best to postpone a decision. Accordingly, he quietly suggested that such a step should be taken only after long and careful deliberation. Furthermore, he said, to become a good preacher one did not have to study at the Sorbonne. "I have heard quite a few doctors preaching sermons," the old man

⁵The first retreat houses had been established in the seventeenth century throughout Britanny by the efforts of Father Kerlivio, Father Huby, and Mother de Francheville, who founded the still vigorous Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Retreat. Probably Claude made this retreat in their local retreat house in Rennes.

observed, “and none of them was any better because he had a degree.” While testing his vocation, Claude could study law. That would be useful for him either as a priest or as a man of the world. If he still insisted on being a priest after that, parental consent would not be withheld. Claude saw the reasonableness of his father’s proposal. Besides, the effects of the retreat were beginning to wear off anyway, and he welcomed a change to have more freedom than he could enjoy at Rennes under the eyes of his parents. Accordingly, he accepted the offer and went off in October 1697 to the School of Law at the University of Nantes.

It was not long before his high ideals and noble aspirations began to fade from his mind. Human respect and the sarcastic remarks of fellow students did the rest. Claude began to set aside his religious practices so that he might indulge in the frivolous pastimes of his friends. He tried desperately to be one of the crowd, but in the midst of it all, his conscience gave him no peace. Remorse so completely spoiled whatever pleasure he engaged in that, as he himself said later in describing this dark period of his life, “it cost me considerable trouble to sin.” “How often did I not find grace surrounding me like a wall of steel and setting up an obstacle which a thousand times in succession crushed my criminal efforts and turned me away from my irregularities.” The thought of the priesthood began to haunt him again and its insistent gnawing increased his uneasiness. He longed to break away from his present surroundings and to be alone with God.

Fortunately, Divine Providence soon provided an opportunity. His father wanted him to transfer to Paris and there receive the best legal training France had to offer. Paris! That was the place where Father Descartes⁶ was presently stationed. The good Jesuit priest had directed him in his early years at school in Rennes and could be counted on now to provide the spiritual guidance that he needed so

⁶ A nephew of the famous philosopher and mathematician.

much. Claude readily obeyed his father's command and set out for Paris at once.

The sincerity of his desire to be really faithful to God this time is demonstrated by the fact that he refused to have his own apartment in Paris. Experience had taught him to fear the freedom of bachelor quarters and for that reason he humbly asked the Jesuits of the College of Louis the Great⁷ to allow him to board with them while he pursued his legal studies at the Sorbonne. Under the saintly guidance of Father Descartes, his spiritual life now began to flourish once again. By the time he had received the licentiate in law (1700), he was ready for another retreat. During the course of this one he would really probe his soul and do his best to emerge with a definite vocational objective. The decision could not be postponed any longer.

After all, he had fulfilled all the requirements necessary for the position to which his father had destined him and would be expected to make his grand entrance into the world of law very soon. On the other hand, his old desire for the priesthood had grown extremely keen again with the renewal of his spiritual life. Carefully and methodically examining himself in the light of God and eternity Claude finally excluded a worldly career for once and for all. With characteristic honesty he decided to abandon himself unreservedly to God's grace in order to prepare himself for the divine call. Rosy visions of personal fame and accomplishment were at last resolutely set aside.

Only one obstacle remained to be overcome – his parents. Since they were totally unaware of their son's decision, they had been busily arranging for him to take his place as a lawyer in Parliament. His mother had even bought

⁷ The College of Louis the Great was one of the most important colleges of France. More than one hundred Jesuit Fathers were attached to the teaching staff of this institution. Its student body numbered more than 3,500. About 600 students boarded there, each with his own valet or governor. Voltaire became a student there while Claude was following its theological curriculum.

an official barrister's gown for him and had it hung out ready to wear. To please her, Claude put on the garment, took a long look at himself in the mirror, then quietly turned and told his parents the shocking news. Although it broke his heart to be the cause of disappointment and sorrow to his mother and father, his decision remained irrevocable. Des Places *père* did everything he could to make Claude change his mind, but realizing at last the uselessness of his opposition, he finally gave in. He even generously consented to his son's apparently quixotic idea of setting aside all hope of ecclesiastical preferment so that he might devote himself entirely to God's service as a simple priest.

To break more definitely with the past and with family ties, Claude resolved to study theology in Paris, far away from his father's home. Since the theological faculty of the Sorbonne was then tainted with Gallicanism, and since Claude was seeking moral and spiritual training as well as theological erudition, he gave the University a wide berth and returned instead to the College of Louis the Great. In this institution, the Jesuits conducted a theological school for the best students of their own society and a limited number of outsiders. By studying here, Claude automatically excluded himself from obtaining a recognized degree in theology, for the Sorbonne jealously monopolized the granting of doctorates.

Since a Sorbonne degree was the open sesame for ecclesiastical advancement, his entrance into this seminary in 1701 caused much excited wagging of tongues and shaking of heads in the fashionable salons of Paris. Claude, who had at last definitely broken with the world, took no notice of the gossip. Only God mattered for him now, and every day found him drawing closer to his Creator in prayerful union. Filled with sorrow for his past aberrations, he tried to make up for them by severe penance and thus become ever more like the suffering Christ whom he felt he had offended so much.

The Foundation of the Seminary and Congregation of the Holy Ghost

A Humble Beginning. With the growth of Claude's severity in his own regard, his goodness and charity towards others developed apace, thereby constituting an unmistakable sign of his virtue's supernatural character. Soon his attention began to be drawn to the poor little Savoyards who worked in Paris as chimney-sweeps and tried to earn a few sous for their destitute families at home. Lonely, abandoned, and homesick, they desperately needed a friend who would preserve their faith and morals. Claude induced a few friends to help him teach them reading, writing, and the elements of religion. Little by little he began providing for their material needs as well.

After he was formally inducted into the clerical state by the reception of tonsure in August, 1702, he seemed to have become increasingly aware that some of his fellow students were almost as needy as the little chimney-sweeps. Seminaries as we know them now were not yet the general rule in France at that time. Students attended lectures at the university or at other theological institutes but they were free to live wherever they wished. For many of the poorer ones, this often involved a precarious state of affairs whereby they snatched a few courses when they were free from the menial jobs that enabled them to eke out a living. It will readily be seen that this procedure was not only detrimental to their health and studies, but also, especially in such a licentious city as Paris, it seriously jeopardized their morals.

While it is true that charitable persons had already founded a few houses to take care of these unfortunates, there were not nearly enough to accommodate their increasing numbers. Claude had only to look around him to see scores of these pale and exhausted young men. With the approval of his director, therefore, he began by secretly helping some with the savings he managed to squeeze from his father's modest allowance. Soon he went farther and

gave them the food that was served to him at the College, satisfying his own wants with a few leftovers from the Jesuits' table. There was not yet any thought in his mind about setting up a new foundation. As he himself wrote later: "There was question only of quietly providing the necessary food for four or five poor students." Soon, however, other people began to share his interest and offered their help. It was a big step forward, for instance, when Father Peter Megret told him that he might have whatever remained after the meals of the six hundred boarders.

With a growing number of dependents on his hands, Claude felt the need of feeding their souls as well as their bodies, for many of them gave evidence of a woeful lack of spiritual training. After he had rented a house in the *Rue des Cordiers*, he selected a dozen of them and on Pentecost Sunday, May 27th, 1703:

Mr. Claude Francis Poullart des Places . . . , then only an aspirant to the ecclesiastical state, began the establishment of the said community of the seminary consecrated to the Holy Ghost under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin conceived without sin.⁸

A short time before, he had preached a retreat to the little group, applying to them the Gospel text: "He hath sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor." At its conclusion, they observed the feast of Pentecost by going to the Church of St. Etienne des-Grès and there, in the chapel of Our Lady, these ardent young souls consecrated themselves to bring the Glad Tidings to the poor. Back at their modest home, a quiet but happy celebration closed the first day of a foundation that

⁸ The traditional date is May 20th. However, in 1703 Pentecost fell on May 27th.

According to Father John Letourneur, C.S.Sp., who is preparing a special study on the early history of the Congregation, the expression "Seminary of the Holy Ghost" indicates the official title of the Congregation.

happy celebration closed the first day of a foundation that was destined to write brilliant and glorious chapters in the history of the Church.

Because Claude could not bring himself to refuse anyone who fulfilled his stipulated conditions, their little establishment in the *Rue des Cordiers* was soon outgrown. Just then a few generous friends came forward, and the young seminary found itself installed by 1706, in much better accommodations on the *Rue Neuve Sainte Geneviève*, now *Rue Tounefort*. Henceforth, the Congregation of the Holy Ghost would move forward on its own initiative.

Poullart des Places and St. Louis de Montfort. Shortly after Claude began his theological course, his friendship with St. Louis de Montfort took on new life. In 1702 the Saint returned to Paris and visited his friend. Just at that time he was seriously thinking of organizing missions and retreats all over France so that the rural population might be saved from immorality and degradation. For this work he obviously needed collaborators and Claude, with his splendid oratorical gifts, would have been just the man to help him start it. They discussed their views, took counsel, and prayed for divine guidance. But in the end, Claude had to tell his friend that he did not personally feel called for the preaching of missions. All his time had to be spent in providing future priests with a decent home and an adequate training for their sublime task. However, he made this promise:

If God gives me the grace to succeed in this, you can count on missionaries. I will train them for you, and you will put them to work. In this way both you and I will be satisfied.

St. Louis went back to Poitiers and in 1703 laid there the first foundation of the Sisters' Congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom. After Easter, however, he returned to Paris for at least a year to aid Claude in the foundation and organization of his Seminary. In fact, it was under his

impulse that Claude decided to expand his charitable activities on behalf of theological students by renting the house in the *Rue des Cordiers*. St. Louis' influence can be seen also in the dedication of the new foundation to the Holy Ghost and Mary's Immaculate Conception. Because of this close association, therefore, and because the Saint had come to Paris for the sole purpose of assisting his friend in establishing the new foundation, there can be little doubt that he was present at the official opening of the institute on the day of Pentecost, 1703. Moreover, since he was the only priest in the group, it is more than likely that he said Mass for them at the Church of St. Etienne-des-Grès before they dedicated themselves to the apostolate.

Ordination to the Priesthood and Death. Despite his preoccupation with the new seminary, Claude continued to prepare himself for his ordination, for he was still a simple cleric. Then suddenly God withdrew from him those consolations which He uses in the beginning to attract fervent souls to Himself. It was in the purifying loneliness of aridity that Claude had to prepare himself. Qualms of conscience about the past rose up to plague him and he reproached himself bitterly for having started his seminary without being sufficiently prepared for such a great responsibility. Convinced of his own unworthiness, he kept postponing his ordination to the priesthood for three years. In the end, however, his director was able to calm his fears and restore peace to his troubled soul. On December 17th, 1707, he became a priest forever, together with the charter members of his foundation who were now aiding him in the task of organizing the new work.

Less than two years after his ordination, God called him to his heavenly reward. Exhausted by the cares and worries of the growing foundation (at his death there were already seventy students) and weakened still more by his severe and incessant penances, he had driven himself to a premature death. At the end of September 1709, pleurisy and an abdominal disease attacked his emaciated body. He

suffered terrible pain, but in the midst of all his suffering he repeated over and over again: "*Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine Virtutum. Concupiscit et deficit anima mea in atria Domini*" (How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. Ps. 83, 1). Four short days of illness sufficed to snuff out the spark of life in his enfeebled body. On October second, at five o'clock in the afternoon, his soul quietly went forth to the lovely dwellings of the Lord.

Father Poullart des Places has never been formally proposed for canonization although there appears to be substantial evidence that his brief span of years encompassed a record of heroic virtue. Up to the present, historical developments have been inimical to the introduction of his cause. The orphaned seminary which he left behind in a still precarious financial condition was scarcely able to undertake such a process. Then, just as it had achieved a measure of security and stability, the social upheavals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries consigned to oblivion many of the documents that would have been invaluable to the biographer. Lastly, the advent of Father Libermann and his confreres of the Holy Heart of Mary caused the Founder to be almost forgotten in the flood of veneration shown to the saintly Restorer. It is only since the beginning of this century that the original Founder is being accorded the attention which he so richly deserves.

In 1959 the spiritual children of Father des Places celebrated the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of his death. Perhaps this observance will initiate the long-postponed introduction of his cause. The late Cardinal Vivès was very much in favor of it and insistently urged the Holy Ghost Fathers to proceed energetically toward that much-desired end. May Divine Providence look kindly upon it when the proposal becomes a reality.

Purpose and Organization of Father des Places' Foundation

A candidate for admission to the Holy Ghost Seminary had to fulfill two conditions over and above the usual requirements: he had to be poor, and he had to be willing to consecrate himself to the most difficult and most abandoned works in God's vineyard. The requirement of poverty echoed a decree of the Council of Trent which, in ordering the erection of seminaries, specified:

In general, the Council recommends that the sons of the poor be selected, although it does not exclude those of richer families, provided that they pay their board and give evidence of true zeal for the service of God and the Church.

It is not hard to understand the reason for this directive. Through the right of primogeniture, the eldest sons of noble and wealthy families inherited nearly everything and, as a result, it was common practice for such families to destine their younger sons for the army and the Church. Ambitious to achieve honor and riches, these young men had little or no interest in the care of souls and thought only of becoming beneficiaries, abbots and bishops.

Fully acquainted with the social fabric in which he lived, Claude intended to bar the way to those who were more interested in a career than in souls by requiring poverty as a condition for admission.⁹ Moreover, his concept of poverty did not involve, as the Jansenists later charged, recruiting priests from the lowest strata of society. He always thoroughly investigated the background of an

⁹ Father des Places' original plan made provision for the admission of wealthy students: he would welcome them if they were willing to help support their poor fellow students and share the way of life followed in the seminary. However, this provision had to be eliminated by his successor. Otherwise, the seminary's legal recognition would have been jeopardized.

applicant's family and admitted only those aspirants who came from decent, if humble, surroundings. As long as their families could not pay the board required in other institutions, such candidates were welcome in his seminary. Because families were usually quite large and because, as we have seen, the inheritance laws assigned nearly everything to the oldest son, even many children of noble birth might be regarded as poor in this sense.

Thus "poor" did not necessarily mean "destitute." In fact, it was applicable to that great segment of the population which earned its bread by any sort of toil: teachers, shopkeepers, craftsmen, farmers, etc. Briefly, it applied to what we would now call the middle class. Even in our own day, few middle class families with numerous children are able to send their sons to a private boarding school. It was for vocations from just such people that Father des Places started his seminary. He wanted to train and educate them in a house that would maintain the modest standards of living to which they were accustomed, for experience had shown that once they were used to a richer and more abundant way of life in an institution for the wealthy, they refused to accept the humbler clerical assignments that carried too small an income for their expensive tastes.

It is scarcely necessary to point out that for Claude "poor" was not to be identified with "dirty" or "rude." His rules stressed personal cleanliness and prescribed napkins for the students and clean white cloths for the tables. True to his early training, he always remained an "accomplished gentleman" and insisted that his students conduct themselves in genteel fashion at all times.

Father des Places' second requirement for admission aimed at providing a remedy for the frightful lack of pastoral care from which much of France was then suffering. As has been pointed out, the younger sons of noble families used the Church to advance their own position and cared little about souls. Despite the fact that there were large numbers of these priests actively pursuing careers in all the large cities of France, the daily round of spiritual activity in the parishes

areas. Like absentee landlords, the appointed pastors lived in the city and sent ill-fed and poorly-prepared substitutes, scarcely able to read a missal, to take their place. As a result, in many areas ignorance of the faith was appalling and morals had sunk to frightful depths of depravity. The founder wanted his priests to be priests in the true sense of the term – good shepherds of the flock, not hirelings. This was the reason behind his specification that they should be willing “to accept and even prefer the most humble and difficult functions in the Church, for which it is difficult to find laborers”.

The foundation of such an institute was very timely from the missionary point of view also. The great Seminary of the Foreign Missions of Paris had just then entered into a period of profound crisis. In 1695 only two Directors remained and its aspirants had dwindled to a mere handful. Shortly after Father des Places' death, three of its Directors had to be expelled for Jansenistic teachings; the number of its seminarians was often no more than five or six; sometimes there were none at all. Its situation remained most precarious throughout the eighteenth century. Fortunately, the flourishing condition of Holy Ghost Seminary was able to offset this weakness to some extent by recruiting vocations for the Foreign Missions from among its students.

From the beginning, the senior seminarians helped Father des Places with the administration of the new house. They assisted him especially as bursars and as tutors in philosophy and theology. From among these seminarians, in 1705, Claude chose Vincent Barbier and James Garnier as his first official associates and after a two-year period of trial they were formally admitted as members of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. In Father des Places' mind, this was to be a society which would assure the survival, the proper functioning, and the expansion of the work he had founded. Thus there are two distinct though inseparable aspects to his foundation: the Seminary of the Holy Ghost and the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. By its very nature and purpose, the Congregation was to remain limited in

and purpose, the Congregation was to remain limited in number, at least as long as the original organization was preserved. It was an association of professors and directors chosen because of their particular ability and talents to teach, train and direct future priests.

Although its members were secular priests who did not bind themselves by the three vows of religion, they lived in common, promised obedience to their superiors, and surrendered the income from their ministry to a common fund. The congregation thus formed was a teaching society, and its educational activities were to be directed for the most part toward training priests for the domestic and foreign missions. To this day, both the Seminary and the Congregation still exist, but it was the Congregation that later developed, through the vivifying influence of the Venerable Francis Libermann, into the present world-wide organization known as the Holy Ghost Fathers, or more briefly, Spiritans.

Another feature of Father des Places' foundation merits our attention at this point, *viz*: his curious prohibition against taking degrees in theology. At first sight one would be inclined to regard this as a strange type of obscurantism, but as a matter of fact there were good reasons for the regulation. First of all, the Sorbonne, which at the time held a virtual monopoly on the doctorate in theology, had aroused suspicions as to its orthodoxy. With Gallicanism, Jansenism, and Quietism rampant in France, Claude preferred to see his students take their theology at the Jesuit College, whose loyalty to the Pope and whose purity of doctrine were beyond question. Then too, a cleric who could boast of a theological degree was eligible for one of the many benefices which were reserved for Sorbonne graduates. Those on whom degrees had been conferred usually became ambitious for ever higher and better paid positions and, since this would have destroyed the spirit of Claude's foundation, he wisely obviated the difficulty at its very source.

From all this it is clear that he was not opposed to degrees in principle. As a matter of fact, he allowed his

students to take a degree in Canon Law, a field of study in which the above-mentioned objectionable features did not exist. Still less should his prohibition be seen as a manifestation of an anti-intellectual attitude which tries to be satisfied with the bare minimum. Aside from the fact that Father des Place's own intellectual brilliance would scarcely justify such an interpretation, the regulations he drew up for his seminary put great stress on experimental science¹⁰ and even added two years of special studies to the customary cycle of philosophy and theology which other seminaries regarded as adequate. Intellectual minimalism would never have given rise to the excellent reputation for ecclesiastical erudition which his society enjoyed throughout the eighteenth century and which induced several bishops to offer the direction of their seminaries to the Holy Ghost Fathers and prompted others to take on des Places' graduates as professors of philosophy and theology in their own seminaries. This academic renown soon gained such wide currency that graduation from Holy Ghost Seminary was held equivalent to a degree from the Sorbonne.

All this clearly demonstrates, therefore, that the early prohibition against theological degrees must be regarded as a prudent safeguard against certain heretical tendencies of the age. Under no circumstances should it be interpreted as an example of that miserable obscurantism which sometimes dons the trappings of humility to maintain that knowledge endangers holiness. In fact, Father des Places is frequently quoted as having said:

A priest who is full or ardor for God's cause but who lacks learning is blind in his zeal, and a learned priest who lacks piety is close to falling into heresy and rebellion against the Church.

¹⁰ As a rule, no one was allowed to begin his theology without having studied mathematics and experimental physics.

One might also ask why Father des Places, who gave his foundation the full practice of religious life, did not formalize it by directing the members to take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and thus make it a religious institute in the technical sense of the term. There is a ready answer for this. In the first place, with few exceptions the old religious orders in France had entered into a state of regrettable decadence during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We need not examine here the reason for this sad state of affairs. It is fully recorded by contemporary historical documents such as the ones which tell how an ecclesiastical committee of the period was busily engaged in abolishing all monasteries that did not have at least fifteen occupants. By reason of numbers alone, therefore, it would have been practically impossible for Claude to start his foundation as a religious order. Secondly, the establishment of new religious communities in France was expressly forbidden. Finally, the modern type of religious community known as a "Congregation" (in contradistinction to an "Order") hardly existed at that time. All the great religious foundations of seventeenth century France, such as the Oratorians (1601), the Vincentians (1625), the Sulpicians (1642) and the Foreign Missions (1660), were secular institutes with an intense religious life but without official religious vows. Any deviation from this pattern would have meant needless trouble for the nascent community of Father des Places. Suffice it to say, therefore, that while there was no question of public religious vows, the routine of religious life was fully observed.

CHAPTER TWO

FRANCIS LIBERMANN: TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

Boniface Hanley, O.F.M.

“You will live, good Bishop, to rue, yes bitterly rue, the ordination you did this day.” Bishop Mioland of Amiens, France, shifted uneasily in his chair as he listened to his reverend counselors address him.

“The man on whom you conferred priesthood this morning is unstable,” a highly respected Jesuit added. “He causes trouble wherever he goes.”

“You have made yourself responsible, Bishop,” a monsignor concluded, “for bringing serious harm to the Church in France.”

These harsh judgments, all the more worrisome since they were unanimous, flew like darts into the bishop’s heart. He had felt so confident when he decided at the suggestion of his secretary, Father de Brandt, to ordain thirty-nine-year old Francis Libermann to the priesthood. Although he knew Libermann to be controversial, he had judged him as worthy as any man could be for priestly responsibility. His counselors’ dour reaction at this meeting following Libermann’s ordination, Saturday, September 18, 1941, surprised and upset the bishop.

Some hours after the meeting, as the bishop sat alone pondering the day’s events, a Sulpician priest, Father Mollevaut, visited him. The priest, novice master at Issy, the Sulpician seminary on Paris’ outskirts had known Francis Libermann for years. Unburdening his troubles to Father Mollevaut, the bishop questioned, “Should I have ordained him, my good Father?”

“Bishop,” the old priest responded, “what you did today is the finest thing you’ve ever done in your life!”

Was Francis Libermann, the new priest, a saint or devil, or something in between? Who judged him accurately, the

old Sulpician or the bishop's counselors? Only the future would reveal the answer.

The Rabbi of Saverne

Lazarus Libermann, chief rabbi of Saverne in Alsace, had great plans for his fifth son, Jacob. Jaegel, as the family affectionately called him, possessed a keen intelligence, depth of spirit and gravity of manner that already indicated his fitness to be a spiritual leader of his Jewish people. At age five, he could rattle off the Jewish alphabet; then he mastered Hebrew spelling and reading, and soon afterwards memorized the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. At ten, he began study of the Talmud, the Hebrew book of civil and religious law. At eighteen, he had mastered that complicated compilation of Hebrew culture, law and wisdom.

Lazarus never relaxed his efforts to train his son. "The Law, you must understand every bit of the Law, Jacob, if you are to be a great rabbi," he insisted. All studies, indeed all communication, formal and informal, was in the Hebrew tongue. Whatever relief his mother, Leah, could have provided from the relentless work disappeared at her death when Jacob was only eleven.

The boy found no surcease in play. Too frail to participate in street games, he gradually grew more and more sensitive and timorous. A nervous twitch developed around his mouth. He looked to Samson, his oldest brother, for comfort, support and love.

Samson

Lazarus desired his oldest son, Samson, to lead the way into the rabbinate for all his other boys. Samson refused and enrolled instead in the school of medicine at the University of Strasbourg.

Away from the rigid intellectual and spiritual constraints of Saverne, Samson felt free to explore the new liberal,

irreligious movements sweeping over Europe in the wake of the French Revolution. The high priests of new thought, Voltaire, Rousseau and Leibnitz, enjoyed great prestige in European universities. Their doctrines promised a new era of liberty and justice. Many Jewish intellectuals found the novel teachings particularly attractive and embraced them enthusiastically. Other Jews, sensitive to the agnosticism embedded in the glittering doctrines and jealously guarding Talmudic tradition, considered the new teachings pernicious. Jews who embraced the new liberalism were ejected from the synagogue. Many of these latter, determined to preserve some religion for themselves and their families, joined various Christian denominations.

As Samson progressed through his medical studies, he continued to ponder the new doctrines. He also fell in love with a beautiful young Jewish lady, Isabel. The young couple spent hours discussing the impact of irreligious liberalism upon their Talmudic way of life. They realized the implacable opposition of Jewish religious leadership prevented any possibility of reconciliation between modern liberalism and traditional Judaism.

After Samson earned his medical degree and entered practice in Strasbourg, he married Isabel. A year later when their first child was about to be born, the two received Catholic baptism.

The Jews at Strasbourg read Samson and Isabel out of the synagogue and led a boycott against his medical practice. The couple moved to Illkirch, a town near Strasbourg. Lazarus, stunned, donned mourning clothes.

The Candidate

The same year, 1824, that Samson converted to Roman Catholicism, Lazarus enrolled Jacob, now twenty-two, in the famous Alsatian Hebrew school at Metz. Confident that his brilliant Jacob would earn a reputation for scholarship, piety and leadership at Metz and thus lay the foundation for a brilliant rabbinical career, Lazarus bade his son farewell with

joy. Once Jacob had established himself, Lazarus would have achieved his highest paternal aspirations and go to his grave in peace. Unfortunately, the new liberal doctrines had succeeded in penetrating even bastions of tradition like Metz's Hebrew school. Jacob soon found himself questioning the Bible's veracity, the Talmud's value and the claim of Jews to be God's Chosen People. Driven by anger that had accumulated through years of frustration and oppression at home, Jacob threw off the shackles of religion and in his mind became what his family name, Libermann, proclaimed him to be, a free man.

Felix

Now Jacob's most pressing problem was breaking the bad news of his decision to abandon a rabbinical career to his father. The situation was made no easier when he discovered that his older brother, Felix, living in Paris, had followed Samson into Roman Catholicism. While Felix was wrestling with the problem of conversion, Samson had referred him for guidance to an old friend of his, Doctor David Drach. Samson and Drach had studied together as youngsters at Saverne. Drach, brilliant and energetic, became a highly respected biblical scholar. He settled in Paris where his studies eventually led him to embrace Roman Catholicism.

Jacob reacted angrily to the conversions of both Samson and Felix, feeling that they had unnecessarily wounded their father. While Jacob would be the first to admit that his father had oppressed him, he still admired Lazarus' devotion to God, dedication to his rabbinate, love for his family and kindness to the poor.

Cruel Deception

The second son's defection to Roman Catholicism shattered Lazarus. The old rabbi bore a stigma now before his Jewish community. He had failed to raise his sons in the

ancient faith. As if that was not enough, Lazarus now possessed a sheaf of letters from busybodies advising him that his beloved Jacob had abandoned Hebrew studies.

At the urging of fellow students as well as Samson and Felix, Jacob wrote to Doctor Drach in Paris. The eminent scholar responded to his note by inviting him to visit and dialogue with him. A journey to Paris would be impossible for Jacob, however, without his father's consent. Jacob returned to Saverne in the fall of 1826. Immediately upon his arrival, he was grilled mercilessly by Lazarus on the Talmud and all his Hebrew studies. During the fierce interrogation, Jacob dazzled his father with his swift, confident and brilliant responses.

"You have not forgotten, my Jacob," the old man congratulated the youth, his eyes dancing with joy. "Those letters of accusation are false," the rabbi continued. "No one could know the Talmud like you unless they studied every day."

Jacob allowed his father the cruel deception.

In honor of the young man's stellar performance and apparent adherence to his rabbinical studies, Lazarus broke out a bottle of his best wine. As the excited father and inwardly guilty son sipped wine together, Jacob sought and received permission to visit Paris. Lazarus gave his son letters of introduction to Mr. Deutz, chief rabbi of the city.

City of Lights

On his way to Paris, Jacob spent several days visiting Samson at Illkirch. He was surprised to see how peacefully and cheerfully Samson and Isabel had adapted to Roman Catholicism even though the doctor suffered financially because of his conversion. Jews refused to visit him; Christians felt suspicious of the convert doctor. Nevertheless, the two made the best of their lot. In time, Samson would be elected burgomeister of Illkirch. Shortly before Jacob left their home, Isabel remarked, "Someday,

you will be a priest, Jacob!" Samson gave him letters of introduction to Doctor Drach.

After arriving at Felix's home in Paris in November, 1826, Jacob tried to sort out his feelings and responsibilities to his religion, his God, his father and himself. The effort produced a blinding, pounding headache.

Dutifully, Jacob visited Rabbi Deutz and Doctor Drach. Both received him kindly; both extended offers of help. At Drach's invitation Jacob took a room at Paris' Stanislas College, a Roman Catholic seminary. The Stanislas offered him an opportunity for silence, prayer and meditation.

Unfortunately, a pall of melancholy descended on the retreatant as he sat alone in his tiny, sparsely furnished cell. A black tumor of depression took root on the walls of his heart, swelled larger and larger as it absorbed the dank waters of despair flooding his inmost being. Depression evolved into a fear that destroyed his resolution, clarity of thought and self-confidence. One afternoon, under the weight of his enormous inner suffering, the lonely Libermann fell to his knees. "God of my fathers, help me – save me!" he sobbed. Jacob Libermann, falling into the abyss of his own nothingness, pleaded for survival. How long he remained in this dreadful state, he did not remember. "All at once," he later wrote, "I saw the truth. Faith flooded my mind and heart . . . I readily accepted Jesus Christ."

The frightful passage from Judaism to Catholicism was concluded. On Christmas Eve, 1826, Jacob Libermann received baptism. He took Francis Mary Paul for his Christian names. "All uncertainty and anxiety vanished immediately," Francis remembered. "I felt a quiet affection for everything that belonged to my new religion."

Toward the Altar

Encouraged by Father Auge, the priest who had baptized him, new convert Libermann enrolled at the Sorbonne, Paris' famous university, to commence studies for the priesthood. He resided at the Stanislas now as a black-cassocked

seminarian. With few exceptions, his fellow students welcomed him graciously. One seminarian, however, frequently unloaded torrents of anti-Semitic abuse on the quiet and timid Libermann. As a result of this merciless badgering and the emotional stress of religious conversion, Francis experienced deep anxiety and occasional seizures which disappeared as quickly as they came. He wrote Samson, describing the symptoms. "Don't pay any attention to them," Samson replied, "you are simply exhausted and need a rest."

Despite his inner suffering Francis exuded an air of calmness and competence. One fellow seminarian wrote in late life, "After all these years, I have not forgotten, Libermann's engaging smile. All I had to do to regain my composure in those days was to exchange a few words with the young Jewish convert."

The Theologian

In the fall of 1827, Francis commenced theology studies at the famous St. Sulpice Seminary in Paris. No outstanding theology scholar, the youth had to work very hard to keep up with his studies. His worries about the headaches and seizures did not prevent his adjusting comfortably to seminary routine. Only one problem remained unresolved in his life: How was he to inform his father of his conversion and pursuit of priestly studies? Up until now he simply could not face doing it. Finally, near the end of the year 1827, he wrote the old rabbi a long and warm letter explaining what had happened and why.

A few weeks later while at noon recreation, a fellow seminarian pushed a letter into his hand. It was from his father. Opening it immediately, Francis read: "You are damned forever . . . The Lord's wrath be upon you!" And then the old man pleaded, "Come back; you are my last hope!"

Francis quickly went to his room. His head pounded with pain. He immediately answered his father's letter,

pleading for understanding. Lazarus never replied. The old rabbi, who had judged himself a failure and a disgrace because of his sons' conversions, died a few weeks later.

The Grand Mal

During the winter of 1829, his third year at St. Sulpice, Francis suffered a series of weak spells, nervous seizures and blinding headaches. "Every time I do a little work," he wrote, "there is a pressure in my head as though my skull were clamped in a steel band." During the next several months, the symptoms increased in duration, intensity and frequency. A few weeks before Christmas, as he was preparing to receive ordination to the subdiaconate, he sustained his first epileptic attack. The attacks returned again and again. Each attack left him full of fear, depression and near despair. The epilepsy impaired his speech and slowed down, at least temporarily, his mental processes. He experienced deep feelings of anger and impatience, as well as temptations to violence. He began to believe his father's curse, so bitterly pronounced in the last letter before his death, was falling upon him.

During the next two years, Francis lived in complete uncertainty. He knew that church legislation of this period did not allow epileptics to receive holy orders. The Sulpicians, pretending not to notice the epileptic attacks, did not dismiss him from the seminary. Yet he knew they could not pretend forever. His absence from classes and chapel grew more frequent as he required more and more rest.

Excuse from class provided him with the opportunity to devote more time to the seminary's special charity – the distribution of food and clothing to Paris' poor people. One bitter, cold day when the people awaiting alms grew restless and disorderly and began pushing and shoving in the line, one of the seminarians called to Francis, "Tell them we won't give them anything if they keep pushing and shoving."

The order caused Francis to bow over in grief. "I can't tell them that," he responded, "these people are suffering enough already."

In December, 1831, the Sulpician Fathers advised him that he would have to leave the seminary. Sensitive and kind, they had tolerated his poor health for these years and Francis deeply appreciated their patience. The Fathers, genuinely attracted to him, offered him the post of assistant bursar in their novitiate house in Issy outside Paris. He accepted.

The Bursar

Francis, combination errand boy, bookkeeper, gardener and procurator, proved an excellent addition to Issy's staff. The epilepsy persisted, driving him at times to temptations of suicide. So powerful were the latter that he refused to keep a knife or any sharp object near him. More than once when walking through Paris, he had to fight back the desire to hurl himself off a bridge into the Seine. "When you realize the terrific emotion that shot through him, and the continual calmness, poise and earnestness, that characterized him," a contemporary reported, "you easily realize how much violence it took to give himself entirely to God."

The Organizer

During his years at the Stanislas and St. Sulpice, Francis earned a reputation among seminarians as a remarkable spiritual director. In 1832, at the request of seminarians of St. Sulpice and with the approval of the august faculty, he developed an organization with St. Sulpice to help seminarians mutually support each other through prayer, study and discussion.

A few years later when the Eudists, a congregation of priests and brothers nearly destroyed during the French Revolution, approached the faculty of St. Sulpice in search of a priest to assume the duties of novice master, the

Sulpician superiors recommended Francis. The choice surprised both the Eudists and Francis. The former since Libermann was not a priest; the latter because of his feelings of personal inadequacy and poor health. Nevertheless, at the urging of the Sulpicians, the Eudists accepted him. For Libermann, a new and totally unexpected episode began in his life.

The Novice Master

In late summer, 1837, Francis Libermann journeyed to Antrain, France, site of the Eudist novitiate. The new novice master applied himself to his work with his usual devotion and distinction. He helped his novices lay the spiritual foundation for their lives and also assisted in numerous housekeeping details accompanying re-establishment of the novitiate.

The new program experienced growing pains. Father Louis, the superior, a mediocre administrator, judged that the work of restoration was not proceeding as smoothly as he had hoped it would. He could not precisely define the Eudist mission within the Church. His fears and worries spilled over into the novitiate, keeping Francis and his charges on edge. Worse, the superior began interfering in the novitiate program. Worried about expenses, he began sending novices out to work. The consequent disorder affected the novitiate adversely.

One novice, M. de Brandt, dedicated himself full-time to badgering Francis. "Imagine," Francis wrote in uncharacteristically strong language to a priest friend at St. Sulpice, "the most dissipated, proud and malicious seminarian you could think of, and you have a picture of this poor fellow who is badgering me . . . He's conceived a mortal hatred and profound contempt for me."

Inevitably, the disorder aggravated Francis' epilepsy. He began experiencing seizures once more. His speech grew halting and his face betrayed signs of inner strain. One night during a talk to his novices, he convulsed and fell to the

floor. The novices carried him off to his room. When he regained consciousness, he told the novice beside his bed, "The good Lord wants you to know what a wretched person you have as your director."

The Founder

Libermann began questioning his role as novice master. The combination of forces against him, his feelings of personal failure, his inability to work with Father Louis and his questionable health, all combined to convince him that he should be somewhere else. But where did the Lord want him to be? The answer, as it so often does, came from the most unexpected source.

Two seminarians at St. Sulpice, close friends of Francis – Frederic Le Vavasseur, a Creole from the French island of Reunion off the southeast coast of Africa, and Parisian-born Creole Eugene Tisserant – along with M. de la Bruniere of a noble French family, approached him and asked him to direct a new missionary organization. The three seminarians would be charter members of a new society which would labor for neglected peoples in far-off places. "You are burying yourself with the Eudists," de la Bruniere complained; "you are wasting your talents here."

Francis decided to accept the invitation. "God has given me the command," he wrote Father Louis. "My mind is made up ... I am ready for anything now."

Father Louis was furious.

Rome

Libermann insisted on obtaining Rome's approval before organizing the new society. In January, 1840, he and de la Bruniere took up residence in the Holy City and began the laborious task of obtaining official approbation for the new society. Founders of new French religious orders were hardly novel at this epoch. After surviving the French

Revolution and Napoleon's oppression, the French Church had exploded with new vigor. New religious orders sprang out of the French soil like daisies after a rain. Officials of the Roman Curia expressed annoyance at the bewildering array of French men and women seeking approval for new religious projects. "Not a day passes without some request for the approval of a new religious congregation coming in from France," one cardinal complained. "In France," another sniffed, "there are only founders."

Roman gossip soon focused on Libermann, the upstart convert Jew, the latest in the procession of French men and women seeking to be founders of new religious orders. Officials of the Curia knew Francis had been denied the priesthood because of chronic epilepsy. "He is ambitious," wise heads concluded, "a victim of his own delusions."

Ubiquitous Doctor Drach, Francis' mentor and now librarian of the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, moved rapidly to arrange an audience for Francis with Pope Gregory XVI. The Pope received Francis, de la Bruniere and Drach kindly, listened attentively, said little, blessed and dismissed them. As they were leaving, the Holy Father called Doctor Drach back into his chamber. "The little one," Pope Gregory said referring to Libermann, "will be a saint."

Shortly after his visit to the Pope, Curia officials summoned Francis. "We cannot discuss the proposed new congregation with you," they advised him, "until you become a priest." Francis, aware that epilepsy made ordination impossible, decided to remain in Rome anyway, hoping his health would improve. De la Bruniere, disgusted with inaction by the Curia, returned to France. Four months later, the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith advised Francis it was still interested in his proposal and encouraged him to develop his plans. Seizing at this straw, Libermann began writing a rule for his new congregation. He decided, at Tisserant's suggestion, to call the new group the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary. Its mission would be "to announce and establish the Holy Gospel among

the poorest and most neglected souls in the Church of God." He singled out the islands off Africa as the special and immediate, but not exclusive, objective of his society's apostolate.

In November, 1840, almost a year after his arrival in Rome, Francis journeyed on foot to the Shrine of Our Lady of Loretto. Upon his return to Rome, he found a letter from his brother Samson who had just attended the consecration of Bishop Raess, coadjutor of Strasbourg. "Bishop Raess," Samson wrote, "is willing to ordain you."

The Priest

Francis returned immediately to Strasbourg to complete priestly studies before ordination. Just after his return, Bishop Collier of Mauritius, another French island off the southeast coast of Africa, notified Francis that he would welcome the new priest into his diocese. As things turned out, it was Bishop Mioland of Amiens, France, who ordained the thirty-nine year old Libermann September 18, 1841. He did this at the urging of his secretary, Father de Brandt, the former Eudist novice who had caused Francis so much pain at Antrain. De Brandt pointed out to his bishop that Francis had not had an epileptic attack in three years.

On the morning of his ordination, Francis wrote:

"This morning I was ordained a priest...Only God knows what I have received on this great day. And only God knows it, for it cannot be conceived by man or angel. Pray, all of you, that it may be for his greater glory, for sanctification of souls and the growth of the Church that I have been allowed to become a priest. Beg Our Lord to accept me as a sacrifice for his honor, for I must devote myself to him from now on."

The following Saturday, newly-ordained Father Libermann, celebrated his first solemn Mass at the Miraculous Shrine of Our Lady of Victories in Paris.

Nine days after ordination, Francis, accompanied by Father Le Vavasseur and a young seminarian, M. Collin, established the first house of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary at La Neuville, a former convent boarding school near Amiens which Bishop Mioland had given them. A short time after opening the new house, Father Le Vavasseur departed for the island of Reunion to begin missionary work. Then Father Tisserant left for Haiti. Father Jacques Laval, a medical doctor as well as priest, left for Mauritius where he remained for twenty-three years until his death in 1864. This missionary trio represented the first wave of apostles to leave La Neuville.

Francis Libermann continued to develop the vision he had of his new congregation. The Holy Heart of Mary Society, international in membership and in apostolate, would establish autonomous foundations in various nations. Each foundation would establish, staff and be responsible for overseas missions. Each nation would have representation on the general council of the congregation. Rome and its authority would be the guiding spirit of the group.

Opposition

Few members of the ecclesiastical establishment shared Libermann's enthusiasm. Paris' Archbishop Affre, Cardinal de la Tour of Arras and a host of minor prelates cared little for the new congregation and less for its founder. In their judgment, Libermann was a zealous Jewish convert in well over his head. Archbishop Affre, who long before had planned a missionary organization for the French colonies, viewed the Congregation of the Holy Heart with no little envy. The new society attracted many vocations, thus diminishing his supply of potential missionaries. Cardinal de la Tour judged Libermann to be an ecclesiastical Zvengali

exercising mysterious and unhealthy influence over youth and robbing his jurisdiction of potential vocations.

French prelates generally disliked Libermann's insistence that his priests follow Roman liturgical law. The Church in France had developed its own liturgy, called Gallican. The Gallican liturgy had become a symbol of French national individuality with the Church, and the hierarchy jealously guarded it.

None of this dimmed Francis' enthusiasm for the Roman liturgy. As soon as it was possible, he recruited the best scholars he could find within the ranks of his own order and set them to produce a study of the liturgy "in conformity with the decrees of the Sacred Congregation of Rites." He insisted that "every statement in the work must be justified by a note referring to the source from which it is derived. The rules must be drawn from sources that are both authentic and absolutely certain." Francis' Spiritans produced *The Manual of Liturgy and Ceremony according to the Roman Rite*, a work of such outstanding scholarship that it won the admiration of the entire French Church.

The Spiritans

Enemies at home, bothersome as they might have been, did not disturb Libermann as much as the opposition he experienced from elements of the French Church and government concerned with French colonial interests. Most surprising was the enmity of the Holy Ghost Fathers, a distinguished French religious order which supplied priests for the French colonies.

Father Claude Poullart des Places, a former lawyer, organized the Order of the Holy Ghost in 1703 to provide priests and proper seminary training for France. Although he died at thirty years of age, the congregation known to the French as The Spiritans survived and earned great prestige for its learning, orthodoxy and care for the poor in pre-revolutionary France. As early as 1732, Spiritans began missions in Canada and later in other French colonies.

During the French Revolution, the Order was almost snuffed out. Nevertheless it survived, its reputation intact but its membership low. When Libermann appeared on the scene, the congregation was barely surviving. The Holy Ghost Fathers viewed his determination to recruit vocations for the missions as a threat to their existence as a missionary order.

Further, they were disturbed at Libermann's missionary theories. The Spiritan Fathers had contented themselves with serving the white French colonials. When they heard that he intended to send his missionaries into the bush to serve the blacks, they judged him insane. The general of their order wrote to the prefect of the Propaganda in Rome, "Your Eminence, I am not at all convinced that these priests will achieve what we expect of them." In response to this warning, the Roman cardinal sent Libermann full powers to appoint priests to the island of Reunion. The Pope's representative in Paris summoned him and spent an hour in conversation with him. Concluding the visit, the papal nuncio advised him, "Have courage for such a beautiful work."

The Pioneers

The Spiritans had managed to lock out Libermann's Holy Heart of Mary missionaries from French Africa. They succeeded in doing this because of their prestige and connections with the French hierarchy and government, both of which shared the Spiritans' disdain for the upstart convert and his fledgling congregation. When American Bishop Edward Barron asked Libermann to staff his mission, which ran five thousand miles along Africa's West Coast and had no interior limit, he seized the opportunity. Seven members of the congregation, along with three lay recruits, sailed from Bordeaux in September, 1843, their spirits soaring as they anticipated the great spiritual adventure awaiting them. The missionaries landed on the coast of Africa and set immediately to work organizing their mission among the blacks. Within months, fever and sunstroke killed five of the

band and badly ravaged the others. All this time, the missionaries had no communication from Father Libermann – although he had written numerous letters – nor he from them. Francis was frantic; the missionaries, bitter and bewildered. They felt he had betrayed them. On October 8, 1844, he received a letter from Bishop Barron. The mission had failed; five of his sons were dead and two survivors were almost dead.

Francis, in the midst of giving a retreat for his novices when Bishop Barron's letter arrived, waited until he had concluded final prayers to inform the novices of the tragedy. After telling the young men of the death of their five confreres, he added in a voice filled with emotion: "I will not and cannot send my men to Africa again unless each one requests to go. You will have to demand it of me." Francis returned to his room in silence and pain.

He knelt down to pray. A few moments later he heard a sharp knock on his door. Opening it, he recognized a young novice-priest at the door. "Father, I will go to Africa," the young man announced softly. "Thank you," Francis responded and closed the door.

Another knock. Francis once more opened the door. Another priest-novice stood there. "I will go to Africa, Father," the second young man said. "Thank you," Francis replied.

And so all through the night, one by one, the young Holy Heart novices came until all had volunteered to take the place of their five fallen brothers.

Libermann could not quit Africa because, as early as 1830 he had recognized its enormous potential as a Christian continent. With iron resolve he told his confreres, "We shall never turn our backs on the Africans!"

Two survivors of the ill-fated mission, Father Bessieux and Brother Gregory, settled in Libreville, Gabon. Although neither man realized it, they founded there the first modern African mission.

World Mission

Libermann's missionary vision was not limited to Africa. He saw the whole world as waiting for Christ's Gospel. He created storms of controversy within his own order, the French Church and government because he deployed his personnel so widely and so thinly, some judged, to apostolates in Europe, Asia and Africa. When he dispatched missionaries to Australia, one of his African confreres, enraged that the African enterprise was denied more personnel, accused him of reneging on the African mission and judging the missionaries there as low and despicable. In a cruel reference to the African fiasco under Bishop Barron, the priest wrote, "As you did before, you still want to send missionaries to their deaths."

Certain French government colonial functionaries, nervous about the society's work with black Africans, viewed Libermann as a wild-eyed visionary espousing in typical Jewish fashion the cause of the underdog. He continued to suffer much at the hands of the Spiritans. Successive generals of that order made no secret of their distrust of him and his congregation. "I have declared open war on Libermann's group," one general announced. "Libermann," he continued, "is an intriguing hypocrite who will bring his society to a bad end."

Such criticism eroded the little reserve of physical strength Francis possessed. He was, however, above and beyond all, a survivor. His unwillingness to quit, despite overwhelming difficulties, rested on his deep faith, dedication to his mission and a low-key sense of humor. "When I stop and think that a poor little guy like me is supposed to arouse Africa," he wrote, "I feel awful. The Divine Reason is using a mighty small fulcrum to lift such a gigantic weight."

The "mighty and small fulcrum" had some mighty advanced ideas for his day regarding Africa. He saw the peoples of that continent presenting a tremendous opportunity for the Church. To exploit the opportunity,

however, he realized the Church must establish stable Christian communities headed by native hierarchies. To bring this about he ordered his congregation to devote "particular care to the education of young people and to provide the most perfect civilization we are able to offer."

The Merger

As the Congregation of the Holy Heart continued to attract candidates, relations between it and the Congregation of the Holy Ghost continued to deteriorate. The situation was not helped when the Spiritans received bad publicity unjustly accusing them of supporting the African slave system.

Libermann, anxious to develop a native clergy, realized the Spiritans possessed a pool of highly-educated priests and a well-founded tradition of seminary expertise.

During the year 1848, he did the impossible. At the urging of Rome he effected, in an expert exercise of diplomacy, a union of the Societies of the Holy Ghost and the Holy Heart of Mary. He engineered the appointment of the Holy Ghost general, Father Monnet, to a bishopric. Monnet nominated Libermann as general of the newly-merged congregation which, as Libermann insisted, was entitled the Congregation of the Holy Ghost under the Protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Libermann was a negotiator par excellence. "One of the things that contributed most to his success in any transaction was his delicate courtesy," Father Le Vavasseur remembered. "His judgment was excellent and he was vividly, keenly, delicately sensitive. When he had to act, he mentally exchanged places with the people concerned and tried to imagine how he would feel if someone treated him as he intended to deal with them."

The merger benefited both sides. Francis gained command of a group of highly-educated men who could develop leaders for the Church among all races and peoples.

Spiritan were assured of survival through the infusion of young, enthusiastic, well-trained priests and brothers.

Period of Adjustment

It would be too much to expect that the union could be completed without difficulties. Some of the Holy Heart Fathers accused Francis of treason and betrayal. Some Spiritan priests plotted to destroy the union by creating severe dissension among the seminarians and newly-ordained priests at the Spiritan seminary in Paris. Libermann gently but firmly dealt with the rebellion. Although he badly needed priests, he dismissed three of the agitating seminarians.

The revolt came to an end when Father Hardy, the seminary professor who secretly led the agitating students, met a tragic death after he was run over by a water wagon.

The French government and the archbishop of Paris viewed the merger with suspicion; the government, on edge because of Libermann's radical mission policies; the archbishop of Paris, because the Spiritan were no longer under his jurisdiction. The terms of the union placed the Congregation under the Propagation of the Faith in Rome. When Paris' Archbishop Sibour insisted that Libermann send a letter requesting that the merged order be returned to his jurisdiction, Francis did so. He mailed the petition to Rome but included with it a note suggesting that the Congregation do nothing about the matter. The officials of the Curia accepted the suggestion.

The Second Founder

Under Francis' leadership, the Spiritan spread throughout Africa, Europe, the Americas, the Indies and Australia. Despite the broad scope of its activity, the order sent more men to Africa than any other religious group in the Church. Observing his orders, the Spiritan patiently dug the foundation of much of today's flourishing African Church

with its native hierarchy and clergy. In Europe, Spiritans staffed seminaries and colleges, earned reputations as spiritual writers, liturgical experts and social workers. Beginning in 1873 Spiritans (known in America as the Holy Ghost Fathers) established many parishes and schools in the United States.

Francis brought fresh life to missionary enterprises throughout the world. He had developed a religious organization that benefited the entire Church with its vitality, vision and energy.

Final Days

None of this, of course, happened without great cost to Libermann. During the cholera epidemic of 1848-1849, he and his seminarians tended Paris' sick and dying. Although none of them contracted the fierce disease, he fell ill from other causes. He ran high fevers, suffered frightful abdominal pain and experienced intestinal spasms that doubled him over. When his brother Felix succumbed to the cholera, Francis was badly shaken. Through it all he continued to work, but time after time chronic fever and pain felled him. Periods of relative good health would be followed suddenly by bouts of severe illness.

In November, 1851, Father Libermann's health collapsed completely. He suffered constant and excruciating pain. His digestive system functioned so poorly that he could scarcely take any food or drink. By mid-January, 1852, he was bedridden. Every movement of his body caused jolting pain. Jaundice yellowed his skin and he suffered an unquenchable, burning thirst. Father Ignatius Schwindenhammer, whom Francis selected as his successor, issued daily bulletins about his condition. "Our beloved Father is steadily growing weaker and weaker," Schwindenhammer reported. "Now he can hardly speak to us in a whisper. He is nearly always in a semi-comatose condition." On January 30, Schwindenhammer wrote, "Our beloved Father seems to be dying – little by little."

On the feast of the Presentation, February 2, 1852, Francis Libermann died. He had been a priest a mere eleven years.

The little Jew from Alsace, alive with the Spirit of God, revealed the secret of his life the day before he died. He turned to his confreres kneeling by his bed and whispered, "Charity above all – above all, charity."

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Marie L. Baird, Ph.D.

The topic of my remarks is the role of the Holy Spirit in spiritual direction. The topic is a timely one, not only because we find ourselves celebrating the year of the Holy Spirit as we anticipate the coming millennium, but also because spiritual direction itself has been seeing something of a renaissance in the aftermath of the second Vatican Council. Indeed, since Vatican II the Church has experienced an explosion of interest in spirituality in general and both individual and group spiritual direction in particular. This is an interest that has gone far beyond the boundaries of the Roman Catholic Tradition to embrace some of the mainline Protestant denominations as well. Christian laypeople have awakened to the possibility that their spiritual journey needs to be taken seriously enough for them to seek some kind of spiritual direction over and above that offered in homilies and adult Christian education programs. And so, spiritual direction is no longer perceived as the exclusive domain of priests and religious orders as interest in it continues to develop amongst the laity.

But the practice of spiritual direction is not a new phenomenon. I dare say the history of spiritual direction is a venerable one that is as old as Christianity itself. The classic literature of Christian spirituality gives ample evidence to support this assertion. From the time of the Desert Fathers onward to the present day this classic literature has preoccupied itself with the issues and problems that arise in the practice of spiritual direction, offering much good advice to those who find themselves in the roles of either director or directee.

At this point it is necessary to ask a very basic question: what is spiritual direction? How are we going to define it? I

offer the definition of spiritual direction as given by William Barry and William Connolly both Jesuit priests who have written extensively on the topic. They define spiritual direction as follows:

We define spiritual direction, then, as help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship. The focus of this type of spiritual direction is on experience, not ideas, and specifically on religious experience, i.e., any experience of the mysterious Other whom we call God. Moreover, this experience is viewed, not as an isolated event, but as an expression of the ongoing personal relationship God has established with each one of us.¹

Even though Barry and Connolly do not mention the working of the Holy Spirit in their definition of spiritual direction, the Holy Spirit is so central to the practice of spiritual direction that it could not exist without the Holy Spirit's ceaseless activity both in the souls of the director and directee, and in the spiritual direction relationship itself. As I hope to show you the Holy Spirit permeates every aspect of the practice of spiritual direction.

Here at Duquesne University, we find ourselves in a unique position to undertake the study of the Holy Spirit thanks to the religious order that founded Duquesne. The Holy Ghost Fathers or Spiritans, have given the Holy Spirit a very high profile, if I might be permitted that characterization, through their charism and ministry to students, staff, faculty and administration. And so it is

¹ William Barry and William Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982, 8.

appropriate if I appeal to their own founder², the Venerable Francis Libermann, to begin my enquiry into the role of the Holy Spirit in Spiritual direction by turning to his writing on the topic.

Libermann believes that spiritual direction is especially important because most people are incapable of discerning God's will for their lives on their own. I would add that this is especially true in our time, as we find ourselves bombarded by a culture that does not encourage any kind of meditative reflection on who we are, where we're going, and what God's purpose for our lives indeed might be. Yet inevitably there are those who think otherwise and believe they have no need for guidance or spiritual companionship. They believe they can do it all on their own by embracing a stance of what I would call spiritual individualism, which is a peculiarly American notion that de Tocqueville would probably recognize as such. Libermann warns that this is a particularly virulent form of self deception in which people fall prey to their own imagination and mistakenly call it divine guidance. He believes that most souls aren't "pure" and "detached" enough from worldly distractions to receive the light of the Holy Spirit without help. And it is precisely the working of the Holy Spirit within each personal soul that enables us to discern God's will for our lives. Libermann appeals to the example set by many saints who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to submit themselves to those within their religious orders who were responsible for their spiritual direction. The example of St. Teresa of Avila springs immediately to my mind in this regard. This wonderful woman and Doctor of the Church, who left us such gems of spiritual literature as *The Interior Castle*, *The Way of Perfection*, and an autobiography remarkable for its honesty and humor, steadfastly submitted her own encounters with God to the direction of her superiors. Indeed, Libermann

² Claude Poullart Des Places founded the Congregation of the Holy Ghost in 1703. Francis Libermann re-founded and renewed it in 1848.

asserts that there are very few cases, saints included, in which God conducts or directs the soul without the mediation of a spiritual director.

Libermann's own definition of spiritual direction can help bring us closer to the role of the Holy Spirit in the direction process proper. Libermann characterizes spiritual direction as a means by which God's will is clarified and communicated to an individual using a spiritual director as intermediary. However, and here is the crucially important point for our inquiry, it is the Holy Spirit who actually functions as director in this situation. The human director, if he or she is a good one, merely echoes the voice of the Holy Spirit who "whispers" to the soul in the depths of each individual's interior being.

We might then inquire as to what God is communicating to the individual soul. Libermann offers us the following explanation. God wants to nourish the human person; and God's nourishment is found in and through Jesus Christ as communicated in the sacraments of the Church. Jesus places his sanctifying grace in the individual soul, thus enabling the Holy Spirit to take up residence within the soul, as it were. It is then the function of the Holy Spirit to direct these souls, by means of internal communications, toward greater holiness and spiritual perfection. What is aimed for here is nothing less than metanoia, a fundamental change of heart leading to spiritual transformation. Again, it is the role of the Holy Spirit in spiritual direction to function as the director by means of internal communications to the individual soul. The role of the human spiritual director is then to pay very close attention to this internal direction of the soul that the Holy Spirit is already accomplishing, and to echo that direction to the directee. Let me put this somewhat differently. In a very real sense, the human spiritual director doesn't really direct. He or she helps guide the directee in the path that the Holy Spirit has already laid out for this directee. The human director does so by discerning very carefully the direction in which the Holy Spirit seems to be leading this particular individual. A good example of this

process may be found in the *Spiritual Exercises* by St. Ignatius of Loyola. In that classic text of Christian Spiritual direction, Ignatius offers the spiritual director many different ways of discerning accurately the workings of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the individual under his or her spiritual care.

Another idea that Libermann advances in relation to the human spiritual director is to consider him or her as a “torch” that can only burn with the fire it receives from elsewhere but cannot generate on its own. The Holy Spirit inspires the human director to become a torch that can guide individual souls to an awareness of the Holy Spirit’s working within them. And here we find the goal of spiritual direction: through the mediation of the human director who is a torch lit by the Holy Spirit to guide the directee, the directee becomes aware of the Holy Spirit within, and the Spirit’s communication of God’s will for the directee’s life. The directee is then enabled to engage in responsible decision making in relation to his or her life given this new awareness. Such decision making may take a variety of forms; a common example is that of vocational decision making. But whatever the nature of the decision to be made, it rests upon the Holy Spirit’s communication of God’s will to the soul of the directee. Such is the role of the Holy Spirit in spiritual direction as understood by Venerable Francis Libermann.

I would like to turn now, if I may, to the writings of a contemporary expert on spiritual direction, a retired faculty member from Duquesne University and my dissertation director, Dr. Carolyn Gratton. Her most recent book, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*, has been hailed as a contemporary classic by spiritual theologians. The bulk of my remarks will, however, focus on an earlier text of hers entitled *Guidelines for Spiritual Direction*, a book that remains a personal favorite of mine.

Gratton begins this text with a discussion of the emergence of spiritual direction in earliest Christianity. Using Jesus Christ as the paradigm of all spiritual direction,

Gratton asserts that his being seized at his baptism by the Holy Spirit enabled him to preach the themes that became the standard for all subsequent spiritual direction: to reform one's life, to believe, to undergo a change of heart or metanoia, to become different and trust in the Gospel message, in short, to be transformed into a new creation whose entire life is re-oriented toward a new goal: to do the will of God. Jesus' public ministry is thus the model for all human spiritual directors to follow.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, the early Christian community came to understand and experience that with these momentous events came the outpouring of the Holy Spirit who was now always available as a source of guidance and through which Jesus' message and work was continued. Through this outpouring of the Spirit, we become children of God. Quoting *Romans*:

All who are guided by the Spirit of God are sons of God; for what you received was not the spirit of slavery to bring you back into fear; you received the spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out, "Abba, Father!" The Spirit himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God. And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, provided that we share his suffering, so as to share his glory. (Romans 8: 14-16)

Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we become free to be transformed, to receive the fruits of the Holy Spirit so that we may become an increasingly faithful image of God in Christ. Quoting 2 Corinthians: "...this Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with our unveiled faces like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the image that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory; this is the working of the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3: 17-18). Gratton writes that through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the early Church realized that "it is this divine adoption into

the mystery, the possibility of sharing life with the Trinity, that constitutes the original directedness of everyone" (38). And so, following St. Paul, she characterizes the aim of spiritual direction to be "the spiritualization, the permeation or penetration of our mortal bodies . . . by [Jesus"] Spirit dwelling in us" (37). This is a change that we ourselves are unable to accomplish. And so, the early Christian community understood that the Holy Spirit is the primary source of all spiritual formation. It also understood that the human spiritual director functions to facilitate the directee's contact and cooperation with the Holy Spirit, the real director, in order to foster the ultimate goal of spiritual direction: union with God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

If we fast forward to our current historical situation as Christians, we might speculate fruitfully whether the current interest in spiritual direction and spirituality in general might reflect the working of the Holy Spirit in our contemporary culture. We might also speculate for a moment as to the ways in which the Holy Spirit might be leading people into an interest in spiritual direction given the precipitous drop in regular church attendance and participation in the Church's sacramental life. Many spiritual theologians point to experiences of crisis as a prime means of propelling individuals into an interest in spiritual direction or some other type of spiritual practice: the serious illness or death of a loved one, an accident, one's own serious illness, job loss, the now famed 'mid-life crisis' or any other of a host of developmental crises, helplessness over one's own or a loved one's addiction and so on. I am not suggesting that the Holy Spirit is the source of these crises! I am suggesting that the Holy Spirit might speak in these crises as a persistent voice suggesting the need for spiritual direction or some other form of re-engagement with the Christian tradition. The same goes for the individual who, while not experiencing active crisis, nevertheless seems to have lost his or her moorings because of various degrees of alienation, boredom with life, disappointment and failure, a general, ill-defined

sense of hopelessness and fatigue that verges on a sort of resigned despair. The Holy Spirit might also nudge this individual toward spiritual direction or some other spiritual praxis. Whatever the precipitating factors, it seems that our time is witnessing a remarkable renaissance of interest in spiritual direction, and it would be shortsighted to overlook the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as a source of such interest at the level of culture itself.

But let us pause further over our current historical situation as Christians by looking at the individual I've just described as either immersed in crisis or alienated and perhaps living a life of "quiet desperation," to paraphrase Thoreau. What we find is that these people are estranged from their deepest, truest identity in Christ and it is the role of the Holy Spirit, through the spiritual direction process proper, to restore them to themselves by restoring them to God. Gratton writes: "The principle of this type of guidance is the Holy Spirit who witnesses to our true identity, who leads the children of God from their slavery to a realization of their divine destiny and who is the ultimate source of direction for those who seek to live a fully human spiritual life" (144). The fact that all spiritual direction revolves around the guidance provided by the Holy Spirit is what separates spiritual direction decisively from any kind of therapeutic counseling. Indeed, the good human director is the one who discerns correctly that his or her directee should engage in therapeutic counseling before being able to continue in spiritual direction. Without entering into a discussion of the aims and methods of each, a discussion that would take us too far afield, suffice it to say that a central difference between spiritual direction and therapeutic counseling is that the former is conducted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; the latter is conducted under the guidance of the therapist. The distinction, I would think, is an obvious one.

If we can posit an individual who has exchanged his or her life of alienation or crisis for one of guidance under the auspices of the Holy Spirit, we are justified in asking what

the process of spiritual transformation looks like. Gratton describes three basic stages that occur in the transformation of the individual (110): (1) his or her consciousness and will become completely re-oriented so as to align themselves with the will of God; (2) he or she undergoes a complete metanoia, or change of heart, which constitutes a surrender of his or her entire person, often achieved at a great cost to his or her “natural” ways of thinking, willing, feeling and acting; (3) his or her love of God becomes expressed in a love of neighbor that achieves active expression in acts of merciful and compassionate care. I have yet to encounter a therapeutic context capable of making such claims! That is so because the Holy Spirit is the only agent capable of bringing about such transformation in the individual, as I have stressed. And that is why, yet again, the Holy Spirit is central to every aspect of the spiritual direction process.

We might inquire, finally, as to the working of the Holy Spirit in the human spiritual director him or herself. Gratton characterizes this individual as someone:

who has truly undergone a metanoia, and who lives now in the new consciousness of faith, who can be a receptive allowing presence, a portal of entrance into the world for the creative power of God. Such a person, whose basic predispositions are guided by concern for the Kingdom, whose life is increasingly open to the Holy Spirit, is also the one most suited to be a spiritual director of others. . . The spiritual guide ha[s] to be a spiritualized person, one in whom the Holy Spirit lives and acts. (189)

As a human capable, through careful discernment, of “echoing” the voice of the Holy Spirit, to recall Libermann’s formulation, the human spiritual director focuses his or her sole disciplined interest on the spiritual dimension of the directee’s existence and experience. Having experienced the guidance of the Holy Spirit in his or her own existence, the

human spiritual director is well attuned to discern the signs of metanoia that appear in the directee's cries for mercy, forgiveness, understanding, salvation, truth, self-acceptance, and ultimately, transformation in Christ.

Finally and most importantly, the human spiritual director functions as a channel of the Holy Spirit; God's loving plan for the world flows through him or her. Gratton asserts that the competent director possesses "eyes of faith than can discover and appraise the signs of God's presence in the midst of the apparent chaos and complexity of the directee's everyday life" (198-99). This is so only because such a director already functions as a conduit for the Holy Spirit's gracious presence in the world.

In summary, I have tried to acquaint you with some of the most important roles played by the Holy Spirit in spiritual direction. The Holy Spirit is the primary spiritual director who communicates God's will to the individual soul. By this means, the Holy Spirit directs the soul toward greater holiness and spiritual perfection in the sense of metanoia, change of heart, or spiritual transformation in Christ. The Holy Spirit is also at work in the human spiritual director, guiding his or her efforts to discern God's will for this particular individual. And so in closing, the spiritual direction relationship is always a triangular one: the Trinitarian God whose Spirit gives life, a directee capable of receiving the Spirit's inspirations, and a human director capable of functioning as an "echo" of the Holy Spirit's communications. Paraphrasing Emmanuel Levinas, there is "me," and there is "you," and there is the divine Other who is always in our midst. And as I have tried to show you, the Holy Spirit permeates all aspects of the spiritual direction relationship.

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(Editor's Notes:

- a. All translations of this work are the author's.
- b. Despite what is conveyed by the title of this entry, Libermann was not the first Superior General of Congregation but the eleventh.)

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CHAPTER FOUR

WHY DO WE CALL THE SPIRIT “THE COMFORTER”? : THOUGHTS ON THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SUFFERING

William Thompson-Uberuaga, Ph.D.

The space between lamentation and confession

The underlying conviction of our meditation will be that the Holy Spirit is connected with suffering in our tradition's thought and practice, and that a sustained meditation on why this is so will yield fruitful insights for us today, as we grapple with suffering in our lives. Let us begin, then, with two prayers orienting us in the appropriate direction.

Come, kindly Comforter, sweet guest of our soul and sweet freshness. Rest in hardship, moderation in the heat, relief in pain!
(Sequence “Come, Holy Spirit,” vv 3-4).

Praise to you, God the Holy Spirit, the consoler. Your unfailing power gives us strength in our bodily weakness...send the power of your Holy Spirit, the Consoler, into this precious oil, this soothing ointment... (Rite of Anointing, over the oil, Roman Rite).

We will strive to situate these reflections somewhere between lamentation and confession. All suffering takes the form of lamentation, which is the “wail” felt at various registers by the sufferer. At the same time, such lamentation implies hope, given expression in some form of confession of God, verbally or implicitly. Why would we wail, did we not protest it and thereby sense the possibility of a contrasting possibility? Note the two movements in Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (the

lamentation, v.1). “...future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn...” (the confession of hope, vv 30-31NRSV). So we are here in this space between both of these, striving to neither overestimate nor underestimate the tensive suffering arising herein.¹

This humility-producing space, an exceedingly mysterious space, is appropriately the space of the Spirit. It is a pneumatic space. “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved...Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness...that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words” (Rom 8.22-24, 26, 27). The Paraclete texts in the Gospel of John are also relevant here. One rendering for “paraclete” would be “comforter.” Etymologically the “com-” in “comforter” suggests the hope-inducing presence of the Spirit “with” (“com”) us in the wail; the “-forter” would indicate the endurance and robustness needed to endure the pain in the midst of suffering (“fortis,” Latin for “strong”).

A brief trinitarian prenote

One further prenote: Since we will be speaking of the Spirit, we must recall some Trinitarian fundamentals. In our traditional Trinitarian theology, all persons of the triune God are always present in all actions of the Trinity, but present in the manner appropriate to their “person” (the “hypostasis” in our technical language). Thus, as we go on to speak of the Spirit, we should recall that the Father and Son are always co-present as well, but in the ways appropriate to them, ways

¹ See Paul Ricoeur’s article on suffering in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), for more on this theme of lamentation and confession, which has stimulated these reflections here.

which are exceedingly mysterious and subtle, to be sure, although we may hazard some suggestions carved out in our theological tradition. For example, commonly we think of the Son as the Word (“Logos” in Greek), because it was through the Word of Jesus that God’s communication of meaning and truth was opened up to us in history. Jesus the incarnate Word is God’s self-communication occurring in history for us. The Spirit, continuing this line of thought, might be thought of as the effective power of the communication, through which it can be heard by us and responded to. If you want, God is a reality of dialogue. The “logos” of the incarnate Son sounds through us (the “dia-” of “dialogue”) in the Spirit’s power. Thus, whatever insight the Spirit grants us into suffering, something of these Trinitarian aspects will shimmer through. For example, in the midst of suffering the Spirit links us with a transfiguring meaning and truth (the Son) trailing off into silence and mystery (the motherly Father, the transcendent origin).

Toward a Spirituality of Suffering

What follows is an extended meditation on the Spirit’s labor as our Comforter in the midst of suffering. It will be little more than a gloss upon our faith’s common wisdom, expressed representatively and recently for us by Pope John Paul II in his letter on suffering. Humanity, he writes, “suffers on account of evil which is a certain lack, limitation or distortion of good.” It “suffers because of a good in which [it] does not share, from which in a certain sense [it] is deprived. [One] particularly suffers when [one] ‘ought’ – in the normal order of things – to have a share in this good, and does not have it.” On the other hand, “Christ has made suffering the firmest basis of the definitive good, namely the good of eternal salvation. . . Christ through his own salvific suffering is very much present in every human suffering, and

can act from within that suffering by the powers of his Spirit of truth, his consoling Spirit,”²

The common wisdom here is twofold. First, suffering in itself is an evil, not to be sought after. Christianity is not a form of spiritual masochism or sadism. Like the Lord Jesus we follow, we Christians pray that the cup of suffering will pass us by, if we can find a way to carry out the Lord’s work without suffering’s presence (Mk 14.36). With Paul, we hold the view that it is the doing of the Lord’s will, not suffering as such, that we seek (Rom 14.7-9). Secondly, if we find that suffering is inevitably to occur, then we believe that Christ through his transfiguring Spirit will enable us to work through this suffering in a salvific manner. C.S. Lewis, for example, was offering us an insight into these two fundamentals when he wrote: “Suffering is not good in itself. What is good in any painful experience is, for the sufferer, his submission to the will of God, and, for the spectators, the compassion aroused and the acts of mercy to which it leads.”³

Before proceeding with our exercise in a spirituality of suffering, allow me to cite a passage from the British theologian Friedrich von Hügel, which suggests something of how our Christian faith, in grappling with suffering, offers a way to avoid the two extremes of excessive pessimism or optimism because of the event of the incarnation. He writes:

For a person came, and lived and loved and did and taught, and died and rose again, and lives on by his power and his Spirit, for ever within us and amongst us, so unspeakably rich and yet so simple, so sublime and yet so homely, so divinely above us precisely in being so divinely near ...
Not one of the philosophers or systems before him

² John Paul II, *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*, apostolic letters, nos. 26, 7 (Boston: Pauline Books, 1984).

³ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, Collier Books, 1962), 110

had effectually escaped falling either into pessimism seeing the end of life as trouble or weariness, and seeking to escape from it ... or into optimism, ignoring or explaining away the suffering and trial which, as our first experience and as our last, surround us on every side. But with him, and along with him and those who still learn and live from and by him, there is the union of the clearest, keenest sense of all the mysterious depth and breadth and length and height of human sadness, suffering, and sin, and, in spite of this and through this and at the end of this, a note of conquest and of triumphant joy. And here, as elsewhere in Christianity, this is achieved not by some artificial, facile juxtaposition: but the soul is allowed to sob itself out; and with all this its pain gets fully faced and willed, gets taken up into the conscious life. Suffering thus becomes the highest form of action, a divinely potent means of satisfaction, recovery, and enlargement for the soul, -- the soul with its mysteriously great consciousness of pettiness and sin, and its immense capacity for joy in self-donation.

⁴John Paul II, C.S. Lewis and now Baron von Hügel, are all asserting that in Christ and his Spirit we are perfected, as the Letter of Hebrews puts it, through suffering (Heb 2.10). Let us now explore this in some more concrete detail.

⁴ Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, rev. ed., 2 vols. (London: James Clarke, 1961), 1:26-27.

*A Mystagogy of the Comforter's Transfiguration of Suffering**Experience number one*

"For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to the afflicted as well as to us . . .," writes Paul (2 Thes 1.6-7). Paul is probably describing here the most common form of suffering known to the believer. There is much to be learned from it, precisely because of its very common and ordinary nature. It exemplifies the pattern of redemptive transfiguration we are seeking to explore. Likely we take it for granted almost, not the suffering, I mean, but the Spirit's transfiguring work with it, probably because the Spirit Comforter is noninvasive, not seeking attention, but working from within, awakening our gifts and talents. The Spirit witnesses with our spirits, we recall (Rom 8.16).

It will be helpful to distinguish the experiences of the victimizer and of the victim. The suffering meant here is caused by someone (= victimizer), and it is also endured by someone (victim). It commonly happens that the same person is both his or her own victimizer and victim simultaneously within the same experience, bringing upon oneself the affliction one is undergoing. Much as we hate to admit it, we do such things, apparently all too commonly. Smokers, substance-addicts, and power-addicts of all types, for example, bring upon themselves quite horrible suffering, which also spills over into waves of misery for those in various relationships with them.

The Victimizer's Experience: The evil we perpetrate brings suffering upon ourselves. We are repaid with affliction for our acts of affliction. This is probably always the case, even if we do not mentally register it, but sometimes it is blatantly obvious. The lesson is then hard to miss. And that is the point: The Spirit is transfiguring the suffering into an opportunity for repentance and sorrow. This would then be related to the tradition which links the

Spirit with our conscience, the Spirit as the one who convicts the world of its sin (Jn 16.8). In our affliction, the Spirit is at work arousing our consciences, enabling us “to call good and evil by their proper name,” as John Paul II recently put it in his letter on the Spirit. The Pope in this passage then recalls the famous number 27 of Vatican II’s document *Gaudium et Spes*, which names by their names without masking them various kinds of evil: “Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself, whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere tools for profit...”⁵

Because the Spirit is so intimately present to us, rendering us transparent, the Spirit can convict us of our lies. Telling the truth about ourselves, first of all to ourselves, and naming that truth properly, such is a sign of the Spirit of Truth at work in our lives. “...for the Spirit searches everything, even depths of God” (1 Cor 2.10). It is hard not to be reminded of the Greek historian Thucydides, commenting on how one of the signs of the triumph of evil in a culture is the widespread masking of the truth of our real situation, through various euphemisms. He notes: “To fit in with the change of events, words, too, had to change their usual meanings. What used to be described as a thoughtless act of aggression was now regarded as the courage one would expect to find in a party member; to think of the future and wait was merely another way of saying one was a coward; any idea of moderation was just an attempt to disguise one’s unmanly character; ability to understand a question from all sides meant that one was totally unfit for

⁵ John Paul II, *On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World*, encyclical letter (Boston: Pauline Books, 1986), no. 43.

action.”⁶ The Spirit, paradoxically, “comforts” us precisely by arousing our resistance to such corruption of our language, and back of that, of our conscience.

The Victim's Experience: A victim may recognize the comforting Spirit's work in the experience of protest that surges up within one against the presence of the suffering, in the refusal to be broken. Somehow we find a way to move on and beyond, sometimes with quite remarkable humor and grace. The martyr is perhaps the most celebrated example of the victim who remains spiritually unbroken, and thus a sign of transcendent hope. But in a small way, all victims who experience and “own” hope are martyrs or witnesses to the comfort of the Spirit at work in the midst of affliction.

But we approach a limit. There are victimizers who never seem to repent at least not palpably. There also seem to be victim experiences which do not palpably result in hopeful protest or the refusal to be broken (abused infants, some Holocaust victims, victims of natural disasters, etc.). The land of suffering is a labyrinth, it seems, and we are only just at its portals at this point.

Experience number two

We are thinking now of a form of suffering in which we notice a form of “soul-stripping” taking place. What do we mean? Here we have in mind the experiences of suffering which do not seem traceable to our own misdoing or sinfulness. They occur to us; they are, if you will, experiences of entering into a kind of passivity, of a being-done-unto. This overlaps with the experience of the victim in our first experience, provided that that victim is not suffering the afflictions owing to his or her own misdeeds. How might the Comforter draw a transfiguring effect from what seems like an undeserved pain? Here we are entering a little more deeply into what C.S. Lewis has aptly named the

⁶ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, bk. 3, Penguin Classics, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin, 1972). 242

“tribulational system” of the city of pain, and it takes a drawing upon the more mystical traditions of the faith to entertain just what the Spirit might be up to in these regions.⁷

To come to the point: Just as the Spirit within the triune mystery points away from herself toward the Father and Son, so the Christian is called to point away from her/himself toward the other, and ultimately toward the Other who is God. Selfhood is found in the decentered self, as the postmodernists sometimes say. This is the mystery of kenosis, of a self-emptying, which aligns us with and is a form of deeper participation in the self-emptying of the Savior himself (cf. Phil 2.6-11). So, too, then, might not the Spirit in these experiences of seemingly unmerited suffering “use” them on our behalf as a way of teaching us to learn to point toward the others and the Other, to learn the deeper mysteries of a self-emptying selflessness, which enables us to make room for others in a profoundly hospitable manner. The key concern here is not, “What do I deserve in justice?,” but “What can I do to give myself for the sake of others and the Other?”

John Paul II has written that one “redisCOVERS the ‘soul’ which he thought he had lost because of suffering.”⁸ Well, in this form of suffering, one is being offered the opportunity to discover regions of the soul hidden to those who live from a simple calculus of merit and justice. These are the regions of mercy and the love called “agape” in the New Testament. All of the sufferings of the Savior were of the unmerited sort, and yet he did not flee them, but grew from them. They became a way in which he was progressively entering into obedience to his Father’s work. I am not suggesting that this is the only way in which we can learn to rise above considerations of our own just merits and think and live on a larger scale. Only that should the suffering occur, the Spirit might then use it to help us grow in sensitivity. We learn

⁷ Lewis, 107.

⁸ John Paul II, *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*, no. 23.

something of what it means to glory in our dependency upon God, and how not to resent that dependency and its mysterious ways, but to see it in a route to greater love.

I came across a story in Nikos Kazantzakis' novel *Saint Francis*, and I hope I remember it correctly. It expresses something of the soul-stripping which unmerited forms of suffering might teach us, if we are attentive to the Spirit's promptings. It seems a very old man, perhaps an octogenarian, lived a very good life and then died. He went to heaven's gate and was asked, "Who is there?" He responded, "I, Lord, I." And immediately he was cast back down to earth. Not understanding why, he resumed his life of moral goodness and discipline. Again, after dying he found himself back at heaven's entrance and heard the question: "Who is there?" Again he responded, "I, Lord, I." And straightaway he was cast back down to earth. Deeply troubled and pensive, he resumed his life of goodness, but this time there was a difference. Upon dying he was again met with the question by the Voice at heaven's gate: "Who is there?" He answered: "You, Lord, You." And straightaway the gate opened and he entered.

Does it seem so unlikely that the Spirit might "use" our seemingly unmerited sufferings as a way of enabling us to learn to say, "you, Lord, you," rather than "I, Lord, I"?

We can supply our own examples. The times a suffering comes our way from someone else's misdoing, and we do not respond in like meanness, but in deeper sensitivity to this other person and an imaginative openness to what it is that drives such people to do such things. Or perhaps we cannot trace the suffering in a particular instance to any one misdeed by another. Its origin remains somewhat anonymous. But no matter; its presence is a chance to grow in mystical passivity and dependence upon God's will and sovereign governance of the universe.

But again, we seem to come to a limit. While we grant that such experiences can be fruitful occasions of soul-stripping and decentering, there do seem to be forms of suffering that make no sense even on the basis of being

taught something about agapaic decentering. Think, for example, of the many horrible sufferings of the infant or child subjected to torture, rape, and even death, whether in some terribly sick home or in the various gulags of evil governments. And, of course, there is also the suffering and destruction coming from natural disasters which seem not to issue in any palpably meaningful soul-stripping. We need to go further.

Experience number three

The borders between numbers two and three are particularly leaky, although there is a certain overlap between all of these experiences. If our second experience might be likened to that of Job, who was soul-stripped in such a way that he learned something of the meaning of surrender to a divine Mystery transcending our normal calculus of justice and fairness (Job 42.3), our third experience looks to the tradition of vicarious suffering, noted especially in the Suffering Servant Songs of Second Isaiah (42; 49; 50; 52-53), and in Paul's writings particularly (2 Cor 5.21; Rom 8.3; Gal 3.13.). Let Isaiah 53.4 serve us as a representative text: "surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted."

Here suffering's transfiguration takes the form of an invitation into the mysterious regions of the Savior's vicarious suffering. Such is an excess, as all vicarious suffering is, appropriate to the divine Spirit who is the Excessive Love between Father and Son. The Father's and Son's shared love is always an overspill, an excess, for it is the infinite love generated by their mutuality. To participate in this Spirit of the overspill is to know something of excess in love. As the divine Spirit's love spills over, "beyond" the inner life of the triune God into the economy of history, bringing us the incarnation and its saving effects, so as we are enabled to share in this Spirit we too become participants

and concelebrants of this power of salvation at work within history.

If you will, the focus of this suffering is not our own soul-stripping, but the flourishing of others. The suffering which seems to “exceed” the needs of our own soul-stripping becomes the means through which we reach and cooperate in healing others. Our own willingness to embrace the cross of suffering is a form of committed love on behalf of others, and such love works as a saving balm within the community of humanity. In “exceeding” our own self-concern in this suffering love we express a form of other-concern. Paul’s expression of this mysterious suffering is perhaps the classic Christian formulation: “I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church” (Col 1.24). Paul likely does not mean that he is adding to Christ’s saving work but rather that he is manifesting its continuing effectiveness in our lives.

This kind of vicarious love, which substitutes somehow for others, yet without cramping their integrity, might be considered a form of mercy, in the sense expressed by Pope John Paul II, in his letter on that theme. “In the eschatological fulfillment mercy will be revealed as love, while in the temporal phase, in human history, which is at the same time the history of sin and death, love must be revealed above all as mercy and must also be actualized as mercy.”⁹ The Pope particularly links this merciful love with Mary, the Mother of Mercy. This mercy dimension of love knows how to meet the needs of people, extending to them the saving benefits of Christ’s saving love, which knows how to place the needs of justice within a larger, loving context.¹⁰

The Pope has also noted another feature of this suffering love, namely, that it can lead us to a profound form of

⁹ John Paul II, *The Mercy of God*, no. 8, encyclical letter (Boston: St. Paul Books, 1980).

¹⁰ Ibid., nos. 7 and 8

participation in and awareness of the world of sufferers. “The world of suffering possesses as it were its own solidarity.”¹¹ The vicarious sufferer becomes acutely attuned to this world, and thus intensifies the solidarity that makes it up. As merciful love penetrates this world, the solidarity changes its configuration, and somehow what one lacks is made up for by the excess of love of the other. Yet at the same time, because this is love of a high, selfless form, it is purified of all pride. Paradoxically the “act of merciful love is only really such when we are deeply convinced at the moment that we perform it that we are at the same time receiving mercy from the people who are accepting it from us.”¹² The radically other-directed nature of this love is a key feature, and only if it is present can we meaningfully speak of that love of excess characteristic of the Spirit of Christ. Where is the “excess” when our own pride is still in need of purification and stripping?

One further question emerges at this point, but it is likely a question that would not be asked by the vicarious sufferer. How is such love bearable? Well, of course, we could say and should say that God’s merciful grace is the only possible answer to this. But we might also ask the question in a more existential sense: How is it bearable in our concrete experience? What concretely is the process rendering this suffering bearable? Let this pastoral comment from Baron von Hügel to his friend Wilfrid Ward, who was dying at the time, give us some insight into the matter: “Count on God’s grace for the day, hour, even minute...God, the essentially timeless will thus and then help his poor timeful creature to contract time to appoint of most fruitful faith and love.”¹³ This contraction of time, in which we do not notice the

¹¹ John Paul II, *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*, no. 8.

¹² John Paul II, *The Mercy of God*, no. 14.

¹³ As cited by Ellen M. Leonard, *Creative Tension: The Spiritual Legacy of Friedrich von Hügel* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1997), 101.

passing of minutes on a clock (the “chronos” of chronological time) because we are experiencing the time of opportunity for soul-expansion (the “kairos” of redeeming time), coming from the experience of eternity within time from the eternal Spirit, perhaps this is as helpful as we can have it at this point. Likely all sufferers enjoy some of this inasmuch as the eternal Spirit is present in all experiences of suffering, but perhaps the contraction of chronos into kairos is especially intense in the vicarious sufferer’s suffering.

An interlude

These experiences would seem to correct and balance one another. For example, the victimizer’s experience of judgment and call to repentance in experience number one might degenerate into resentful brooding. But the hopeful experience of the refusal to give in to self-inflicted affliction, offered to the victim in the same experience, is a form of union with Christ in the Spirit that can free one from such brooding. On the other hand, the sense of deep, mystical union with Christ in experience number two can lead to a subtle narcissism, while the merciful love of vicarious suffering in experience number three can free one from such narcissism, moving one into service and other-concern. Paradoxically, the other-directedness of experience number three possesses its own subtle spiritual traps as well, such as hard to decode messianic complexes. The more humble awareness of one’s sinfulness and need for repentance in the first experience can help purify even the lofty heights of vicarious love, helping us to keep it truly vicarious. All of this is exemplified in the liturgy: We move from repentant confession of our sins, on into union through holy communion, and into service for other as we are called to live out the broken body and poured out blood.

A further excess

We have explored some of the more palpable ways in which the Spirit is at work as a transfiguring power and presence in the midst of our sufferings. In some meaningful way we can “see” this transfiguring power at work, and it serves us as a profound consolation in this our world of all too much suffering. At the same time, now at the end of this little meditation, it is more important than ever to recognize that there are many forms of human suffering (to abstract from the pain of our animal “relatives”, which also needs some serious consideration) that seem to defy our ability to glimpse the transfiguring presence of the Spirit in their midst. The three experiences we have noted give us the hope and anchor upon which we can meaningfully trust that the Spirit is at work in these more opaque forms of suffering, and that in some way a more complete and palpable transfiguration will occur. But what this finally adds up to is that any really adequate confrontation with the mystery of suffering leads us to the issue of the after-life, as we call it.

Brian Hebblethwaite points us in the right direction: “If the universe is to be seen as the creation of an omnipotent and perfectly good God, then the believer must be prepared to speculate about the future goal of creation, where evil will be finally overcome, and in which the countless sufferers down the ages will themselves participate.”¹⁴ We are thinking again especially of those sufferers, like the mutilated and tortured infant or the victims of mass genocide, or even the victims of so-called natural disasters, whose sufferings seem to defy a palpable transfiguring presence of the Spirit. At least in our historical view.

On at least two counts this is an appropriate place to end. God’s full transcendence would seem to demand an eternity beyond this life. God is the really true “excess” whose excessive being is more than enough to adequately

¹⁴ Brian Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion* (New York: Hawthorn, 1976), 95.

counteract and exceed all our suffering on earth.¹⁵ Secondly, the remaining excess of our suffering on earth cries out, so to speak, for an eternity. We began with the contrast experience of lamentation and hopeful confession. Heaven would be the final extrapolation of this contrast, in which the lamentation is fully transfigured into the joy of confession.

We may appropriately cite Julian of Norwich at this point: "...all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well."¹⁶ But let us end with Meister Eckhart, who is a little offbeat, not unlike the spendthrift excess of eternity.

"Authorities say we shall do well to hurry to that school in which the Holy Spirit is the lecturer; but I tell you that when the Holy Spirit is the teacher, his students must be well prepared if they are to understand his excellent teaching – which proceeds out of the Father's heart...When God laughs at the soul and the soul laughs back at God, the persons of the Trinity are begotten. To speak in hyperbole, when the Father laughs to the Son and the Son laughs back to the Father, that laughter gives pleasure, that pleasure gives joy, that joy gives love, and love gives the persons [of the Trinity] of which the Holy Spirit is one."¹⁷

¹⁵ See Friedrich von Hügel, "On the Preliminaries to Religious Belief and on the Facts of Suffering, Faith and Love," in *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion, first Series*, (London: J.M. Dent, 1921), 110, 115.

¹⁶ Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, long text, chap. 27, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1978), 225.

¹⁷ Meister Eckhart, Fragments 35 and 36, in *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, Raymond Bernard Blakney (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1941), 245.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE EMBODIED SPIRIT OF LIBERMANN'S SPIRITUALITY AND SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL THEMES

David L. Smith, C.S.Sp., Ph.D.

*Because the Holy Ghost over the bent world broods with
warm breast and with ah! Bright wings.*

(Gerard Manley Hopkins)

Introduction

The 20th century was renowned as the Age of Anxiety.

“Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is let loose upon the world.”

(Yeats)

Prozac, valium, xanax fill the candy jar of the land.

The 20th century was celebrated as the Age of Space.

“One small step for man; one giant leap
for mankind.”

(N. Armstrong)

Cocaine, crack, ecstasy. The nation is spaced out.

The 20th century gloried as the Age of the Atom.

“We have met the enemy and it is us.” (Pogo)

“Now I am become Death, the Destroyer of Worlds.”
 (Oppenheimer)¹

And while all of this was taking place, we discovered once again with St. Augustine, “O God, our hearts were made for Thee alone, and they are restless until they rest in Thee.” And thus the Age of the Spirit came to be, and spirituality has become as popular as popcorn.

In the *New Catholic Dictionary of Spirituality*, the entry on the Holy Spirit begins with these words: “The Holy Spirit is central to spirituality and to any understanding of it. In fact the word spirituality reflects the realization that Christian life is led in the power and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit” (Farrelly, 1993, p. 492). Closely allied to this claim is a question and a concern raised by Susan A. Ross in her entry on “The Body” in the same Dictionary. After reviewing the history of the body in Christian thought, she concludes on a somewhat down note. She writes, “Yet the ambivalence toward the body found throughout the history of Christian spirituality has not entirely disappeared, even in present efforts to develop a positive theology of the body.” Ross’ question centers on one of the most important challenges spirituality faces: “To what extent can spirituality fully embrace the Word-become-flesh?” (p. 100).

In this essay I would like to make some small effort to take up her challenge and respond to her question. I shall do so in the context of a Spiritan spirituality, a life of the Spirit developed by Claude Poullart des Places, the Founder of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (1703) and by Francis Libermann, who in 1848 became the leader of Poullart’s group, breathed new life into it, while richly elaborating the heart of its original inspiration. My focus will be upon an obscured and shadowed profile of this Spiritan spirituality,

¹ J. Robert Oppenheimer was reminded of this passage from the Hindu scripture, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, as he watched in silence when the world’s first atomic bomb exploded at a test site in Alamogordo, New Mexico on July 16, 1945.

the human body, the flesh of the world. In this context, I will also try to show how closely Libermann's spiritual wisdom resonates with some central concepts of humanistic psychology.

Poullart des Places

It is regrettable that Poullart des Places did not gift us with a richly developed doctrine of spirituality as Libermann did. There were a number of sound reasons for this. He died very young; his life spanning a mere 30 years. He was ordained a priest only two years before his death. He was only 24 years of age when he organized his first group of "Poor Scholars" with the opening of his Seminary of the Holy Spirit in Paris in 1703. He was so occupied with his hands-on care of his poor students and poor young workers that he had little time left over to write. What he did write was for the most part not for publication but for his personal reflection. Still, he lived intensely in the presence of God and exhausted his health and his life in the service of the poor and marginalized. Total openness to the Holy Spirit and service to the "underdogs" of his time, consumed all of his time and energies. In one of his writings he does share his heart's desire with us.

I wished to make of myself a complete sacrifice of myself to God in the work of the missions. I would have been only too happy if, after setting the whole world on fire with the love of God, I could have shed the last drop of my blood for him whose blessings were ever before my eyes.
(cited in des Places, Gandy, & Lécuyer, 1983, p.3).

Faithful to his spirit, the *Spiritan Rule* of 1734 states that, "the Spiritans will be ready for everything: to serve in the hospitals, to evangelize the poor and even the pagans, to prefer above all others the most humble and most laborious posts, for which it is difficult to find incumbents" (*Regulae*, Ch. 1, cited in *Spiritan Papers*, no. 16, 1988, p. 3).

Francis Libermann (1848)

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Francis Libermann's spirituality has animated and inspired the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. To fully appreciate his unique spiritual doctrine it is essential to keep in mind its initial birthing ground. Recall his brief biography earlier in this book. Born and raised the son of the Rabbi of Saverne, steeped in the study of the Torah, the Law, and the Talmud, Libermann was immune to the dichotomized thought of Descartes which had tainted Western thought, in particular in France, since the early 17th century. Descartes' radical distinction of mind and body generated heavy collateral damage. Mind, Spirit, Soul, all things spiritual became conceivable as dis-embodied and were so languaged. Mind vs. body, spirit vs. matter, natural vs. supernatural, secular vs. sacred, became the coin of the religious and spiritual realms. Thanks to the Holy Spirit of the Word Made Flesh, in a most paradoxical way, Libermann in his orthodox Jewish home was immunized against the Cartesian virus. After his conversion to the faith of Christ, thanks to his rich formation in Jewish thought and holiness, he would prove himself to be an astronaut of his age, rocketing out to galaxies of the spirit in orbits no other spiritual giant dared to travel. Libermann has been credited with creating a revolution in the history of spirituality. Pope Pius XII spoke of him as an "outstanding master of the spiritual life." Henry Koren, C.S.Sp., after years of intense study of his spiritual writings, did not hesitate to claim that in the sphere of spiritual doctrine he proved himself to be an authentic pioneer. Koren's language almost rises to the level of poetry when he strives to express the reasons for the originality, universality and timelessness of Libermann's spiritual doctrine. He writes,

Father Libermann's science of holiness escapes the confines of his native France, rises above the romanticism and self-conscious mortification of the

nineteenth century, and exercises its appeal far beyond the personnel of his own congregation. (Koren, 1958, p. 157)

In spite of superficial differences, the spiritual doctrines of Des Places and Libermann pulsate with one heart and one soul. The Founder's passionate dedication to the Holy Spirit embodied in his life-service to the poor was his essential gift to his followers and in due time to Francis Libermann.

Embodied Spirit

Embodied is the key word here. Their hearts burned with the love of the Holy Spirit. But for them, in their lives and in their works, the Holy Spirit was no new age amorphous being. It was the all-powerful Spirit of God who hovered over the chaos of creation, breathed life into man and woman, and made holy the world. It was the Holy Spirit who gives Life. The Holy Spirit manifested in their lives and their work was always incarnational, giving life to the world. As strange as it may sound to the ears of some, Catholic spirituality is always and in all ways a spirituality of the flesh. Our Catholic faith begins with the exultant proclamation that "The Word was made flesh" and terminates with the great act of faith, "We believe in the Resurrection of the Body." The journey of life upon earth for the Christian is a joyful song and dance of the human body always touched and embraced by God's material creation. From the water and oil of baptism, to the oil of confirmation, to the bread of the eucharist, to the bodies of the nuptial couple, to the oils of ordination and to the final anointing unto glory, our Catholic faith, our religion, our spirituality announce to all the world that we are our bodies redeemed by the Body and Blood of Christ through water and the Holy Spirit. Holiness has been described as a response to the reality of daily life (M.C. Kaveny, 2003). Kaveny highlights the embodied life of holiness to be found in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. She reminds us of the foundational

words of Jesus to his disciples, “Whatever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me.” Then she comments;

But you cannot perform the corporal works of mercy without getting your hands dirty. You cannot feed the hungry, care for the sick, give shelter to the homeless or bury the dead without encountering repulsive sights and smells. And you cannot perform the spiritual works of mercy without being touched in your own heart by the misery in some lives. It is not just Mother Theresa caring for the dying on the streets of Calcutta. It is ordinary people performing ordinary works of mercy too numerous to count. (p. 17)

The human body stands at the heart of Libermann’s doctrine of spirituality; it is a spirituality of embodied life for ordinary people. At the same time, a book by John Haughey, S.J. *Housing Heaven’s Fire: The Challenge of Holiness*, reminds us that “the experience of holiness relies on the Holy Spirit to mediate it, inspire it, and bring it to birth” (D. Donnelly, 2003, p. 32). Koren (1958) locates the power of Libermann’s spiritual doctrine in his emphasis on the Holy Spirit’s action in the life of the individual. It is an existential doctrine. It is what Heidegger has called a “concrete universal.” It is paradoxical in so far as “it transcends the limitations of time and space by its very concreteness” (p. 157). For Libermann is always and only concerned with the concrete life of the individual in his particular situation where the Providence of God has placed her/him. “This concrete wholeness in Libermann’s approach gives his spirituality a kind of timelessness...One might even characterize it by the term... ‘existential’” (pp. 157-58). Libermann’s advice “to pray our experience” well captures this existential flavor. His doctrine of “practical union with God” reveals the depth of this concrete universal. We shall see that his spirituality is rooted in the concrete world of daily life, the world of the ordinary. It is a communal and

social spirituality anchored in our human inter-corporeality; a body spirituality *au fond*.

Libermann's personal history as the son of a rabbi well disposed him toward an incarnational and social spirituality. The notion of the corporate-body-personality abounds in the Hebrew Scriptures. Ross (p. 101) points out that the language of "body" to designate a covenantal people's togetherness is peculiar to Paul who speaks of Christians being "members of one another." But the concept of inter-corporeality which binds all human beings together is deeply rooted in ancient cultures and in the Hebrew Scriptures. The notion of corporate responsibility and collective guilt were common coinage in ancient cultures. Paul did not hesitate to boldly question the Christians of Corinth, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" (1 Cor 6:15). We are never truly only individuals, for even when we deny it, we are joined by our common human flesh. "In the new age of Christ, we can actually speak of the 'social flesh' of Christ" (Haughey, p. 126, cited in Ross, p. 102). In consequence, our service of the poor can never be justly denigrated as "mere social work." Libermann was concerned not just about the "souls" of people, but about the real bodies of the "Poor Blacks" in the French colonies, which motivated him to found his Congregation. He was moved by the bodies of the millions of slaves torn from their African homes. In the spirit of his personal Jewish history, he was moved by all the suffering human flesh of the world.

We first encounter the impenetrable density and blinding darkness of the mystery of flesh when we hear the angel's response to Mary's words, "I know not man"..."You will conceive of the Holy Spirit." We have heard this astounding and incomprehensible angelic response so many times that we are no longer astounded. We go about our business as though we understand. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." From that moment in human history, the world became a new creation. Nothing could ever be the same again.

In a very profound way, Libermann understood that the mission of the Christian community is identical to the mission of Jesus, “...to proclaim God’s reign as the power of unconditional grace to make persons, relationships and bodies whole” (Volf & Lee, 2001, p. 389, emphasis mine). The gospel miracle stories leave no doubt of the validity of this claim. Jesus was dealing with bodies, curing the sick, restoring sight and hearing, feeding the hungry crowds, giving life to the dead. Jesus did all his work in the power of the Spirit. It follows that “Since to live as a Christian means to walk in the Spirit, *all* Christian work is done in the power of the Spirit – whether it concerns the rebirth of persons, the reconciliation of people or the care of bodies” (p. 403).

Gestalt Psychology's The Here and Now

Libermann’s spiritual doctrine points us toward this incarnational profile of the Holy Spirit’s action in the world. Koren reminds us that it is not enough just to listen to the words or read the texts to discover what truly animates an individual or an organization. We must pay heed to what the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty has called “operational intentionality,” the lived and living motivation. “One must pay attention to what really lives in a group – its driving force, its *charism*” (Koren, 1990, p. 15). And so he asks of the Spiritans, what has been and what is the driving force of both of their Founders and of their members? Here is the heart of the matter, his unequivocal response: “...our lived spirituality can be best described as an Evangelical Availability which remains attentive to the Holy Spirit manifesting Himself in the concrete situation of Life” (p. 15). As we shall see time and time again, Libermann’s spirituality is contemporary in so many ways. In his insistence upon “the concrete situation of life,” we respond to echoes of Gestalt Therapy’s focus upon the Here and Now. In their primer of *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* (1951), Perls, Hefferline and Goodman suggest this exercise, “Try for a few minutes

to make up sentences stating what you are at this moment aware of. Begin each sentence with the words 'now' or 'at this moment' or 'here and now'" (p. 31). After presenting this technique for contacting the environment, they comment:

Whatever is actual, is, as regards time, always in the present. Whatever happened in the past *was* actual then, just as whatever occurs in the future *will be* actual at that time, but what *is* actual – and thus *all* you can be aware of – must be in the present. Hence the stress if we wish to develop the feeling of actuality, on words such as "now" and "at this moment."

Likewise, what is actual for *you*, must be where you are. Hence the stress on words like "here." (p. 32)

Libermann's repeated advice to be attentive to the Holy Spirit "in the concrete situation of our lives," cradles the "here and now" of Gestalt Therapy by grounding the individual's spiritual life in the actual here of the existential dialogue of past-present-future; not somewhere beyond where we find pie in the sky. In this light, "...openness to experience demands our detachment from the past" (Koren, 1990, p. 17). Contrary to the plaint of far too many Catholics today, Libermann never pined for the good old days of some mythic past. In fact, he considered the clergy's failure to keep up with the times as a great fault. With the dawn of the democratic state in France, he encouraged his men to get out to vote at a time when the Church in general was suspicious of democracy and hostile toward it. Unlike so many of his clerical contemporaries, Libermann boldly declared that "...in the final analysis" the supreme authority in the Congregation is neither the Rule nor the superior, but "the majority of its members" (cited in Koren, 1990, p. 18).

This availability in the here and now is a radical openness to the action of the Holy Spirit in the concrete events of our ordinary daily lives; a wide receptivity, a full

willingness to be directed by the light and love of the Holy Spirit. It is no mere passivity, but springs from a free decision, a personal option to be totally faithful to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit in our lives. “If Our Lord gives us his Spirit, it is not so that we will continue to live even partially, according to our own (spirit); this same Spirit has to be our leader, our love, our all” (*Libermann, Spiritual Writings*, Supplement, p. 79, quoted in *Spiritan Anniversary Diary: 1703-2003*², p. 24).

We must be like a feather in the wind, the sail of a ship responding to the breath of the Holy Spirit. It is here that we find the basis of Libermann’s flexibility and notable lack of rigidity in his spiritual doctrine at a time when his spiritual and religious contemporaries were locked in a narrow formalism. His spiritual doctrine seemed to be an aberration at the time. He was not a man inclined to rigid systems, regulations or control of others. His natural disposition to let others be themselves anticipated and prefigured Carl Rogers’ Client-Centered Counseling by at least one hundred years.

Libermann’s Rogerian Inclinations

For instance, empathy is a core concept in the theory of Rogerian psychotherapy. It also played a major role in Libermann’s life and in his spiritual doctrine. Rogers tries to describe what occurs in the most satisfactory therapeutic relationships. He writes,

...that it is the counselor’s function to assume, in so far as he is able, the internal frame of reference of the client, to perceive the world as the client sees it, to perceive the client himself as he is seen by himself, to lay aside all perceptions from the external frame of reference while doing so, and to communicate something of this empathic understanding to the client. (1965, p. 29)

² Hereafter referenced as SAD.

It would appear that Libermann's personality was richly endowed with this gift of empathy. Boniface Hanley, O.F.M. (n.d.) describes this special talent,

Libermann was a negotiator par excellence. "One of the things that contributed to his success in any transaction was his delicate courtesy," Father LeVasseur remembered. "His judgment was excellent and he was vividly, keenly, delicately sensitive. When he had to act, he mentally exchanged places with the people concerned and tried to imagine how he would feel if someone treated him as he intended to deal with them." (p. 24)

It is amazing how this ability to mentally exchange places with other people reflects basic Rogerian principles. For example, Rogers postulates that, "...Every individual exists in a continually changing world of experience of which he is the center" (1965, p. 483). This postulate closely mirrors the central role that "the concrete situation of the individual" plays in Libermann's spiritual doctrine. A Rogerian corollary of the previous postulate states, "...The best vantage point for understanding behavior is from the internal frame of reference of the individual himself" (1965, p. 494). In his own life and teachings, Libermann fully embraced this axiom.

This gift of empathy, Libermann's extraordinary capacity to understand the other person by entering their personally experienced world, intimately linked with another core concept of Rogerian psychotherapy – unconditional positive regard. Rogers describes this condition of therapeutic change as follows:

When the therapist is experiencing a warm, positive and acceptant attitude toward what is the client, this facilitates change. It involves the therapist's genuine willingness for the client to be whatever feeling is going on in him at that moment

— fear, confusion, pain, anger, hatred, love, courage, or awe. It means that the therapist cares for the client, in a non-possessive way. It means that he prizes the client in a total rather than a conditional way. By this I mean that he does not simply accept the client when he is behaving in certain ways, and disapprove of him when he behaves in other ways. It means an outgoing positive feeling without reservations, without evaluations, . . . (1961, p. 62)

Keeping in mind this description of unconditional positive regard, we can only stand in awe before the spiritual genius of Libermann, when we read his words;

The uncomfortable feeling we can have when we are with people who think and judge differently to ourselves, who despise us and have no time for us, can easily make us stiff and timid, with the result that we are gloomy, evasive and awkward when we are with them. This can give a very bad impression and put people off our religion. We must love everybody, whatever they feel about us or our religion. They must be given complete freedom to think and act as they want. No man on this earth is capable of forcing the will, the conscience or the intellect of others. God doesn't want to do it so why should we, . . . (quoted by C. de Mare in *SAD*, p. 376).

Libermann's attention to his "uncomfortable feelings" reminds us of Rogers' focus upon the essential importance of accepting all our competing and conflicting feelings if we wish to attain to a wholesome state of bodily (organismic) congruence.

Intimately bound to Rogers' therapeutic principle of unconditional regard for the client is the principle of acceptance. He defines acceptance as,

...a warm regard for him as a person of unconditional self-worth—of value no matter what his condition, his behavior, or his feelings. It means a respect and liking for him as a separate person, a willingness for him to possess his own feelings in his own way. It means an acceptance of and regard for his attitudes of the moment, no matter how negative or positive, no matter how much they may contradict other attitudes he has held in the past. This acceptance of each fluctuating aspect of this other person makes it for him a relationship of warmth and safety, and the safety of being liked and prized as a person seems a highly important element in a helping relationship. (1961, p. 34)

Libermann's writings abound in examples akin to this Rogerian attitude of acceptance. Close associates commented on feeling at home and at ease in his company. Without doubt his generous capacity to accept others as they were, to let them be themselves contributed greatly to the healing relationship of his spiritual direction. Here are some examples of how highly he valued both self-acceptance and acceptance of others.

Bear gently, patiently, and most peacefully as best you can your needs and your infidelities. Etch deeply in your heart that Jesus and Mary tolerate them with sweetness and kindness, and that their love for you is always the same. (p. 5, 6)... The so great happiness of perfection is not a matter of a day. You need time, work, prayer and confidence. One gets there only after getting up and down and encouraged to begin again many times. Don't torture yourself nor become discouraged (p. 7)...God...gives us his grace even when we are offending Him. My hope is there...He will help me despite my faults. Be tranquil about all that (p. 8)...Here is a general rule that must be absolutely observed, and that for conscience's

sake: every time a thought produces in the mind some rigidity, like callousness, struggle or trouble, you must treat it as a temptation and reject it...putting your mind in calm before God and sacrificing yourself to His divine love (p. 10)... Try to keep yourself interiorly in great peace, so that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be not idle in you. If you let yourself become troubled, agitated, anxious, the Holy Spirit will not be able to act in you as He would (pp. 19-20)... Generally speaking, when you have committed a fault, don't trouble yourself over it (p. 29)... Here is a general rule that must be followed absolutely and that in conscience: every time a thought about no matter what comes up and produces in the mind a certain perplexity or a certain tenseness, something like a harshness, something like a hardness, a struggle or trouble you must treat it like a temptation and reject it (pp. 35-36)... (All quotes extracted from Libermann (n.d.), trans. F.X. Malinowski).

Some religious people have been suspicious of “self-acceptance,” rejecting it as an invention of secular humanistic psychology. Vitz (1977), for example, parodies humanistic psychology and blames its ‘selfist’ theories for the narcissism of our age. Unlike Rogers and Libermann who believe in the essential goodness of human beings, Vitz stands in the Calvinist tradition and does not so believe. It is obvious from the advice of Libermann that self-acceptance is central to his doctrine of spirituality. Over and over again he urges us and encourages us in the strongest terms to treat ourselves always in a calm, gentle, peaceful and self-accepting fashion. His language is never hard, harsh, severe, judgmental or condemnatory. All self-rejection or self-hatred is foreign to his spirit. Only in the heart that is at peace with itself can the Holy Spirit be free to do its work.

The acceptance of others is a correlate of this self-acceptance. When the gentle angel of self-acceptance swoops down to slay the dragon of self-negation, it

simultaneously opens its arms to embrace and affirm others. Rogers stated that closely related to an openness to our own inner and outer experience there emerges an openness and acceptance of other individuals. To make his point, he quotes from Maslow about self-actualizing individuals.

“One does not complain about water because it is wet, nor about rocks because they are hard....As the child looks upon the world with wide, uncritical and innocent eyes, simply noting and observing what is the case, without either arguing the matter or demanding that it be otherwise, so does the self-actualizing person look upon human nature both in himself and in others.”
(cited in Rogers, 1961, p.174).

Expressions of this gracious acceptance of others just as they are abound in the spiritual writings of Libermann.

Put down as a fundamental principle in the matters of direction: one must not constrain nor cramp the one being directed. Refrain from prescribing too many rules...I regard as a capital point in direction...leave grace with a lot of liberty... (pp. 13-14). Avoid as a big fault all that is hard and inflexible... (p. 66). It is a great principle, in divine things, not to wish to lead everybody according to one's opinion and one's manner of acting. Rigidity, in this kind of thing, has deadly results. God has His view on each one. He communicates and distributes His graces diversely (p. 35). For your ministry, follow this general rule: severity loses souls, sweetness saves them.
(Libermann (n.d.), p. 51)

Finally, we can say that Libermann's spiritual doctrine of self and other acceptance, saved him from any tendency to an idealized perfection. Karen Horney, a great neo-Freudian analyst speaks of the idealized self. She describes this idealized self as “what we are in our irrational imaginations,

or what we should be according to the dictates of neurotic pride" (1950, p. 158). This idealized self is impossible of attainment. Libermann had anticipated this psychological insight a hundred years before. In 1846 he wrote this advice.

A very important principle for action is to be always on guard against ideal perfection. It is good that one knows how things ought to be for success; one must know the conduct to follow for the realization of the means of execution which are the best but it is yet more important to know how to modify one's views, to bend, to accommodate oneself to people, things and circumstances. Be very assured that you will never execute your plans as you would desire. It is a mirage to wish to obtain a complete result such as one sees it and as one desires it (Turn back to Horney's text. The similarities of thought are amazing.) It is of the highest importance to adapt, to bend in all, if one wants to have success; otherwise one gets hurt from the difficulties coming from persons and things. (Libermann (n.d.), pp. 51-52)

Once again, we are reminded by this text of Libermann's stress upon the action of the Holy Spirit in the concrete situation of our life. We do not work out our salvation in some ideal situation in some perfect world, where we and other people are perfect. It is by availability to the Holy Spirit in our concrete situation that we are saved.

Evangelical Availability

Koren (1990) states that this evangelical availability contains two aspects. First, an availability before Our Lord. Our personal holiness consists in this. To live the Lord's Prayer in our daily lives. "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done." Second, availability for others. As Koren notes, these are two profiles of one reality already expressed in love of God and love of neighbor. And this two-fold reality also

contains a double dimension: the life of prayer which is our personal union with God and our life of action to transform the world for Christ's people. Our work at the altar must always overflow into the public square. This two-fold reality of the spiritual life is well captured by the following quote: "Listening calmly to what the Holy Spirit has to tell us and living intensely the love of Christ so as to be close to the poor – this is the essence of Père Libermann, the summary of his spirituality" (J. Gay, *Les Chemin de la Paix*, p. 173, cited in *SAD*, p. 8.).

In this text we find a type of both spiritual and material poverty in Libermann's spirituality. There is first an availability to the direction of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives, a spiritual poverty, allowing ourselves to be open and to be led. Then there is a material poverty, a life of simplicity and frugality, what Koren describes as a moderate attitude toward the necessities of life. His spiritual poverty was incarnated in his openness to the world and to experience. He did not believe for one moment that all the angels were in the Church and all the demons outside the walls in the world. The theology of "we are good and they are evil" was totally alien to his mind-set. Koren tells us that Libermann distrusted " 'plans that have been completely conceived and well conceived' from the very start, because '...experience is lacking.' He wants his men to avoid measuring everything by fixed ideas... '(because) one does not acquire any true experience' in such a way" (1990, p. 23).

Holy Releasement

Our availability to the Holy Spirit who speaks to our hearts in the concrete experience of our daily life springs forth from what has been called "holy abandonment." Jean Gay quoting LeVavasseur reports that for Libermann,

Abandonment is the perfection of patience. When one has reached this state, the

person rests in God, gives himself up completely and no longer wants to act of himself. He allows himself to be totally directed by God, according to his wishes. It is a state of continuous availability. (SAD, p. 112)

To quote Libermann directly,

“Our Lord wishes our business to drag on. Every step I take must have its hitches and delays, so that I learn to abandon everything into his hands and rest in him in everything.” And, “We have kept along the way of providence up to now. Providence alone has guided us.” And, “Christian perfection does not consist in a certain more or less elevated state of prayer, but in a union of perfect love with our Lord, founded on a complete renouncement of ourselves, our self love, our will, our ease, our satisfaction, and everything we prize. The more perfect our renouncement, the more perfect our love.” (cited in Gilbert, 1983, p. 120).

This spiritual wisdom of abandonment or renouncement resonates with and echoes the wisdom of other sources and traditions. For example, in the Twelve Step program of A.A., new members are instructed “to let go and let God” and “to get out of the driver’s seat”, and “to let it happen.” This holy abandonment is a profound willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to take over our lives. It is a type of active receptivity, not to be confused with will-less-ness. It is the contrary of will-full-ness which struggles to force the state of affairs. Heidegger speaks of this phenomenon by the name “releasement” (*Gelassenheit*). At first he used the word to describe an authentic and free-spirited stance toward technology. Today in German it is used to express “composure,” “calmness” and “unconcern.” In earlier ages, some mystics, including Meister Eckhart, used it in the sense of letting the world go and giving oneself to God. Heidegger speaks of releasement as follows:

Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together. They grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way. They promise us a new ground upon which we can stand and endure in the world of technology without being imperiled by it. (1966, p. 55)

Releasement can hold off the day against the approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age which according to Heidegger,

...could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle and beguile man that calculative thought may some day come to be accepted and practiced as the only way of thinking...Then man would have denied and thrown away his own special nature—that he is a meditative being. Therefore, the issue is of saving man's essential nature. Therefore, the issue is keeping meditative thinking alive. Yet releasement toward things and openness to the mystery never happens of themselves. They do not befall us accidentally. Both flourish only through persistent, courageous thinking. (p. 56)

This releasement to the mystery, Spiritan availability to the Holy Spirit in the concrete situation of life, expresses this persistent and courageous thinking in a radical decentering of one's self.

The Dethroned Ego

Historians of Western thought speak of three great decenterings of the human consciousness. The Copernican revolution displaced the human race from the center of the physical universe; Darwin toppled us from the throne at the apex of the biological hierarchy, and finally Freud shifted the cool rational ego to the "seething cauldron" of the instinctual unconscious. All three decenterings have been crudely employed by various advocates to demean and

belittle the worth and dignity of the human being. In a counter-move, the Spiritan releasement to the Holy Spirit, decenters the false self, only to elevate and further ennable human existence. (You are temples of the Holy Spirit.) And this de-centering, rather than snatching us out of the world for some nebulous spiritualistic life, sends us back into the wounded heart of the world to serve and to heal.

Spiritan spirituality, embodied in the lives and works of both des Places and Libermann, was never a spirituality of the sanctuary or a religion of the sacristy. The decentering of the self is a movement from the technical, functional, ego realm of existence to the deep level of the self where we are meditative and open to the activity of the Spirit. Gilbert (1983) writes, "This, then, is the heart of Libermann's spirituality – docility to the Person of the Spirit of God living in us" (p. 39). Libermann spoke of this docility many times in various ways: "...to follow the movements and impressions of the Spirit, who is in us. This is to be your whole line of action..." "It is the Spirit who must work in our souls, more or less perfectly according to God's plan for us..." "All you have to do is keep yourself pliable in the hands of the Spirit of life..." "Your soul is the ship, your heart represents the sail, the Holy Spirit is the wind; he blows into your will and your soul goes forward" (pp. 37-41). In all of these texts we discover the power which generates our availability to be open to the experiences of our concrete existence.

It is in this power that we also move into practical union with God. In spite of what may seem to be a spirituality from on high, Libermann's way is a very simple and ordinary one. Practical union with God unites a deep submission to the Holy Spirit with the practical work of our lives. The busier I am, he said, the more my union with God is strengthened. Contemplation for Libermann was not the most perfect form of praying. Rather he found the most perfect prayer in practical union with God through service for others. Holy abandonment, renouncement, surrender to the Holy Spirit were for him a kenosis, a pouring out of self

in the service of the poor and abandoned. In this sense, his spirituality could well be called a liberation spirituality.

A favorite aphorism of Libermann's, "God is all. Man is nothing." was on his lips as he lay dying. With these words, he in no way wished to belittle the great dignity of human beings. Rather, they sprang spontaneously from his lips, for he had been born and raised in a richly pious Jewish home, in the shadow of the synagogue. Perhaps, we can best understand this aphorism in the context of the decentered self. Libermann was born into the Age of the Enlightenment. Religion was moribund. Faith had been routed. Human reason reigned supreme. "God is all. Man is nothing." perfectly describes the radical decentering of the ego to open the self to the Holy Spirit.

Practical Union

Practical union is a key concept in Libermann's spiritual doctrine. It is precisely what he says it is; a union with God through praxis, in praxis and by praxis of everyday life. Based upon his own busy life schedule and the heavy work schedules of missionaries and most lay people, Libermann knew from experience that it was not possible for most men and women seeking God to withdraw into the solitude of contemplative prayer. Libermann (n.d.) describes this practical union with God as the integration of our availability to the Holy Spirit, our personal holiness, with our zeal of living for and serving others. It is in no way hyperbole to call this active union a radical, yes, even a revolutionary concept. With this concept, Libermann reveals the actual unity and perfect congruence of our active life on earth with a life of holiness and service in the Holy Spirit. With the touch of spiritual genius he transcends many traditional dichotomies of human existence, showing us how there is a sympathetic unity of nature and grace, the natural and the supernatural, spirit and matter, mind and body, the self and the other, prayer and the life of action. Consider for example the life of Jesus, as Libermann always did. Jesus

was always about the business of his Father. He did not remain for long in the desert or on the mountain top to pray. He was out in the market place, in the public square. Perhaps, today, he would be at the Mall. But wherever he was active, he was united with his Father, “I always do what is pleasing to Him” (John 8:29).

The concept of practical union also helps us to understand more fully the ancient maxim, “actions speak louder than words.” The decentering of the ego to the realm of the receptive embodied self, in union with the Holy Spirit, reveals who we truly are in the operational intentionality of our behavior. Since practical union operates at this pre-reflective level of the embodied self, it also becomes possible to understand the problem of what has been known in the tradition as “spiritual consolations.” We can say that our preoccupation about how we feel is the concern of the conscious rational ego. The practice of practical union, exercising faith, hope and love in the ordinary behavior of life, shows us that “do I feel holy?”, “do I feel spiritual?” are not the correct questions.

Libermann once wrote to his missionaries who were laboring in the heat and harsh conditions of Africa, “Tell our beloved brothers not to be at all discouraged if they feel no sensible piety,” and he stressed the necessity “...to sacrifice oneself for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, without experiencing palpable interior satisfactions.” He cautioned his missionaries that they would not feel “holy,” but “The apostolic man has given himself entirely to God without seeking to enjoy God, but uniquely devoted to his service he sacrifices the enjoyment of God in order to serve this same God” (quotations cited in Malinowski’s *The Holy Spirit in Francis Libermann*, (n.d.), pp. 35-36).

When we look at the life and work of Father Libermann, what stands out in his spirituality of practical union is his total devotion to the poor and the disadvantaged. Both Libermann and Poullart des Places were men of action in the service of the oppressed. Libermann wrote of the Spiritans’ Founder,

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit was founded on the day of Pentecost, 1703 [by] M. Poullart-Deplaces of the diocese of Rennes with a view to training priests consecrated to working in the most neglected works. For a long time, this work relied entirely on alms given by charitable people; the venerable founder himself used to go looking for such help and then he would serve the students with his own hands and help them by doing the most menial of tasks. (Libermann, "A Notice on the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and the Immaculate Heart of Mary and its works, 1850," cited in *SAD*, p. 157).

In his own *Provisional Rule* of 1849, Libermann insisted that all Spiritans must make themselves "...the advocates, the supporters, and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them" (*Rule of 1849*; n.d. X, 517).

Mary – Mother of the Poor

This Spiritan commitment to the liberation of all the oppressed found its inspiration in their devotion to Mary who expressed in her own life the heart of Spiritan spirituality – availability to the Holy Spirit in the concrete situation of her own life. Her Magnificat prayer is the perfect expression of Libermann's practical union. In this prayer her soul sings the greatness of her Lord and her heart rejoices in God her Savior. At the same time she never averts her eyes from the actual condition of the world in which she lives. "He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly." Both Poullart des Places and Libermann were inspired in their mission by Mary's unjaundiced vision of the world. In her constant practical union with God, she did not close her eyes to the poor of the world. "He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty." While she pondered in her heart everything that happened to her Son Jesus, she was united with him in faith-

full action through her every act of caring for him and all his needs, from the crib to the foot of the cross. Mary believed in the mission of Jesus as proclaimed by Isaiah,

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for He has anointed me,
to bring the good news to the afflicted.
He has sent me
to proclaim liberty to captives,
sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord.*
(Luke 4:18-19)

We are speaking of real human bodies here. To what extent can spirituality fully embrace the human body?

At the beginning of this essay, we quoted Ross “To what extent spirituality can fully embrace the Word-become-flesh is one of the most profound challenges it faces” (p.100). I believe that Mary has given us the answer to both our questions. It is the answer that permeates all of Libermann’s spiritual doctrine. What greater practical union can there be than when Mary said “yes,” and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us?

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CHAPTER SIX

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION

George S. Worgul, Jr., S.T.D., Ph.D.

I think we can all remember being in the third grade during the first week in September. School had just begun. We spent the first few nights covering our books with brown grocery bags and scotch tape. We had already successfully learned our teachers' names, the number of our classroom and the names of the students who surrounded our desks – for better or for worse. Suddenly the dreaded moment arrived. The teacher announced that there would be written homework that evening. Every student was to compose a two page essay on the topic of "My Summer Vacation". We were strictly admonished to be creative and imaginative, very imaginative. A tradition had begun which would be repeated again and again for the next five years of primary school.

During High School, the assignment changed. "Summer Vacation" was out and creative stories were in. Occasionally, a peculiarly sadistic teacher (the one who always addressed us as Miss or Mister) would impose the dread of all dreads as a writing assignment: a poem. A different assignment but the admonition had the same ring to it: be creative, be imaginative. So we ran to a book labeled a thesaurus and searched for large words ending with the same last two letters that we could string together in four line stanzas. Unfortunately, this imaginative effort was seldom appropriately rewarded and its creativity unappreciated. College adjusted our perspective. We didn't need to create the great ideas ourselves, we could read them in books and hear them in lectures. Sometimes we would raise our hand in class and ask the teacher to further explain an idea or thought which we hadn't understood or as we then uttered, "I don't get it." Usually, our professors smiled (delighted that

someone was alive, awake and alert) and summing up all their Socratic energies retorted: "young man or young lady, you must use your imagination, you must let your imagination run free and everything will be clear." Now we felt a little better, plugged in, on familiar turf. Yes, we were supposed to do that thing that we didn't know what it was or how to. But at least we grasped that education possessed a remarkable continuity. Ignorance did build on ignorance. But alas, this was the moment of intellectual grace. Knowing that you don't know is the beginning of true knowing. And here we all are, knowing that there is an imagination, that we all have one but somehow still suffering different degrees of mystification about what our imagination might be. Is it a thing or energy or force? What exactly are we doing when we imagine? Are we daydreaming or shivering from a nightmare? Are we simply musing? Are we to display intense emotions and passion or cling to a cold disinterested objectivity? Are we to imitate or mime? Why do we need imagination? What is its utility? Hasn't science and economics freed us from this primitive desire for mythological thinking which seems to possess lunatics, lovers and poets of all ages and cultures (as well as theologians and people still active in religion)?

In some ways we still carry the dreaded experience in hearing that third grade written assignment, precisely because we may still be confused about this imagination. At the same time, we are all here with certain prejudices (conscious and unconscious) and it is important to recognize that they color our view, restrict our horizons and determine our perspective. We are divided on who are our personal imaginative heroes: Plato, Socrates, Augustine, Aquinas, Freud, Jung, Shakespeare, Van Gogh, Merton, Nouwen? We react differently when we are in the presence of imaginative people. This encounter might be seen as a curse by some or a blessing by others, an experience of satiation and fulfillment or an occasion for a migraine from too much of a good thing. Overactive imaginations can suffocate and destroy. Under-active imaginations can bore and produce

starved personalities. We probably vary greatly in judging the imagination's relative worth and importance. Some prize it as the hope for a future. Others see it, at its best, as a toy for self entertainment in empty moments.

So here we are. Asked once again to imagine and be creative. And a new essay topic is at hand, not "My Summer Vacation" but "The Holy Spirit and the Creative Imagination." Our goal must be both modest and lofty. We must try to grasp both more expansively and with greater depth what we are doing when we are imaginizing and what is involved in this activity.

Allow me to offer some preliminary answers to these questions and then explain the answers as we proceed. In imaginizing we are becoming human. We are living through and exploring our humanness within the context of life's possibilities. We are fashioning ourselves through our concrete choices. In imaginizing we are appropriating the possibility of our lives as we grow and develop in our human community. Our imagination, then, is the foundation, the ground for our becoming the human persons we are destined to become. The imagination is not a mere faculty among our other faculties, a faculty simply on par with reason, emotion, will, or intuition. No, imagination grounds and sustains all our other human faculties. To be human is to be an I. P., an imaginative person.

From a Judeo-Christian perspective, human imaginizing is a divine gift – perhaps the primordial gift of God to us. Imaginizing constitutes our unique place among creation's creatures. Only we humans are created in God's image and share in God's imaginizing. The divine person whose mission it is to create and sustain our imagination, our human divinization is the Holy Spirit. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit creates, fuels, sustains and corrects our human imagination and its imaginizing. Moreover, the Holy Spirit interrelates our imaginations so that we are formed and shaped into I. P. C.'s, imaginative person communities i.e., the imaginative people of God and the imaginative Body of Christ.

I will now attempt to unfold these two fundamental claims, the first anthropological and the second theological. Perhaps a general map will be helpful. First, I would like to quickly identify the different players in the game. Second, I would like to suggest the major themes which anyone interested in the imagination must explore. Third, I would like to highlight different biblical clues on the Holy Spirit's role in the creative imagination. Finally, I would like to identify some challenges which emerge from our investigation of the Holy Spirit and imagination.

The Players

Philosophical reflection on the human imagination reaches back to the ancient Greeks. Their suspicion and consequent lack of enthusiasm for the imagination would stretch across the ages into the 19th century. Only in 20th century with phenomenological thought would we find an open, positive embrace of the imagination.

Plato judged imaginative knowing as a lesser form of knowledge. Since he considered imagination an imitation of perception, it must be a subsidiary faculty to perception which was more proximate to the real. Perhaps Plato's view was skewed by his underlying mistrust of poets, the most obvious cultural imaginizers. Aristotle's view was slightly more positive. Imagination was situated between perception and intellect and had a special role in the operation of memory. The great Scholastics did little more than reflect the position of the Greeks. And, as far as I can tell, none of them ventured to overtly link their theology of creation with the human imagination.

The first modern philosopher to seriously and substantially explore the imagination was Immanuel Kant in both the *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Judgement*. Even though he abandoned his investigation of the imagination and focused more on reason, Kant was to leave a deep mark on true students of the imagination: Coleridge, Heidegger and Sartre, to mention a few.

Initially the 19th – 20th century approach to the imagination was to investigate it as an element of aesthetics. However, with Heidegger, Sartre, Ricoeur and Derrida, studies of the imagination entered into the question of metaphysics and the challenge of ethics. In my judgment, this shift should not be underestimated for it moves our interest in the imagination from the periphery to center stage and from the utilitarian to the moral. Moreover, one might legitimately interpret the contemporary philosophical attention on the imagination as a sloughing off of the Enlightenment's fixation on a logical understanding of reason and a renewed appreciation for the human person as a unity-in-multiplicity. Imagination is challenging logical reason's claim to the throne of benevolent despotism.

The contrasts between logical rational thought and imaginative thought are evocative. First, both are goal oriented, they seek knowledge. But imaginative thought appreciates the many different paths by which this goal can be reached. Second, logical thought proceeds by way of limitation through judgment, gradually narrowing the lens of investigation and the object of scrutiny. Imaginative thinking thrives on allowing for multiple methods of investigation and steps forward tentatively, always trying to bracket judgments made too quickly, always trying to keep options open, and always ready to be surprised. Third, where logical thought strives for Cartesian "clear and distinct ideas," imaginative thinking values the ambiguous, the shrouded, and the mysterious. Being neat does not necessarily imply truthfulness. Dionysian forces have as much right to the search for a meaning in existence as Apollonian forces. In this area, imaginative thinking requires more courage than logical rational thought. It is always safer to explore what we can easily see and identify than to grope in the dark for the yet-to-be-known. That long soft fur which we touch might not be a rabbit but a sleeping lion. Fourth, logical thought rejects non-sequiturs. They are an obstacle to truth. Imaginative thought can appreciate a certain value even in disjointed thoughts. They can be

suffered because even in their distortion they can make a positive contribution to the metaphors with which we try to understand our lives. Fifth, imaginative thinking will not exclude any possibly thought, idea or image from its process. The unimaginable might generate insight and meaning. Imaginative thinkers thrive on “What if’s” and “I wonder” as they wander bringing together in a field of exploration what logical thinkers tend to keep apart.

In listing these contrasts, I am not attempting to demean one form of thought or coronate the other. They exist side by side, both pursuing truth but by different roads. However, they can not be interchanged. They both need each other. Working together, they enrich our grasp of reality.

Exploring the imagination is not the privy of philosophers. In many ways, psychologists have a greater “lived experience” of the human imagination, due to their clinical practice. This has given rise to various psychological theories of the human personality. Perhaps one might describe the psychological enterprise itself as an imaginative effort to comprehend a person’s or communities’ imaginative thinking, language and behavior. Was this not the impetus which drew Freud to sire this hitherto unknown and unimaginable science and perform the quintessential imaginative act? Wasn’t Freud continually exercising both logical and imaginative thinking? And, appreciate the enormous overall results! A new path was open to treating patients whose apparent abnormalities were now understood as rooted in the psychic dynamics of their experiential lives. Gradually, Freud produced an imaginative theory that guided us into the various interrelated forces operating both consciously and unconsciously within our human personalities. While we might argue with the specifics of Freud’s theoretical model, we must not overlook one truth. Freud’s imagination changed Western culture.

While Freud first imagined a dramatic personality, it was Jung, setting himself apart from Freud and Adler, who placed imagination at the center of personal and collective

psychic life. Jung offers us a marvelous text in *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. He writes:

It is in the creation of fantasies that we find the unitive function we are seeking. All the elements engaged by the active tendencies flow into the imagination. The imagination has, it is true, a poor reputation among psychologists, and up to the present psychoanalytic theories have treated it accordingly. For Freud as for Adler it is only a so-called 'symbolic' view distinguishing the tendencies of the primitive desire presupposed by those two investigators. But one can set against this opinion--not upon theoretical principle, but essentially for practical reasons--the fact that though it is possible to explain and to deprecate imagination in respect of its causality, imagination is nevertheless the creative source of all that has made progress possible to human life. Imagination holds in itself an irreducible value, for it is the psychic function whose roots ramify at the same time in the contents of the conscious mind and of the unconscious, in the collective as in the individual. But whence has imagination acquired its bad reputation? Above all, from the circumstances that its manifestations cannot be taken at face value. If one takes them concretely they are of no value; if, like Freud, one attributes semantic significance to them, they are interesting from the scientific point of view; but if we regard them according to the hermeneutic conception, as authentic symbols, then they provide the directive signs we need in order to carry out our lives in harmony with ourselves. (pp. 298-299)

Without doubt, imagination was at the center of Jung's vision of personality development. Imagination was not simply a way of thinking. It was also the stuff of growth, development and integration. Jung's bold proclamation of imagination's magisterial role, invites us to leave our "players" and turn to the central themes which must be engaged in studying the imagination.

Central Themes

Imagination is intimately related to four other fundamental human activities: perceiving, metaphorizing, symbolizing, and mythologizing. By recognizing the central characteristics of each component and attending to their interrelatedness, we can come to a deeper appreciation of the beautiful complexity and organic unity which makes us who we are, i.e., creative persons bound together with the task of imaginatively understanding and creating our world and our lives. Let us briefly sketch the central element in each activity.

Perceptions are the bookends of our lives. We proceed in life from our first living experiences, always perceiving. We also look back over these experiences and try to perceive their significance, their meaning and value. Perception has as a given the world into which we are thrown. We did not choose our life or world but we do find ourselves being-there (*Dasein*).

Our perception does not function like the old fashioned desk top blotters which soaked up the ink from leaky fountain pens. We do not merely passively soak up experience. On the contrary, perception is thoroughly active, coloring and shaping reality, giving meaning. At the same time, perception perceives the world. There is no gap between the perceiving subject and the object perceived. Perception is intentional, it is radically open to the world. In knowing, this openness is filled with whatever is perceived.

Our perception is our history, not in the exclusive sense of what has happened to us for good or ill; but, also in what we choose to pick and select as important or significant. Herein our perception shapes us through our choices. Our lives are not merely the result of what we endure. No, we select and decide in our perception and thereby create and interpret our own lives.

While perception opens us to the world, it is characterized by an essential narrowness. Our perception can never take account of the infinite dimensions and

possibilities of any experience. We know this and cleverly perceive one way, and then another, and then another. But our perceptions will never exhaust reality. From another angle the world and life look fresh, new and unexplored. Perhaps this is why a classic piece of literature can generate so many different cinema graphic portrayals. Just a few years ago we witnessed *Romeo and Juliet* aboard an Ocean liner sharing Venus/Erotic love and trying to overcome the economic stratification of society only to endure tragedy and the ultimate pain of separated love, death itself. Who but an imaginative cinematographer would have imagined that the Teutonic Titanic could substitute for the Shakespeare's English Globe theater? If only the lookouts had perceived differently. Cinema sensitizes us to the narrowness of perception. Cinema marshals sound and sight so that we might see a particular way. But even in this controlled situation, we still pick and choose, emphasize and ignore, all influenced by our history. (This may be why, for example, many Holocaust survivors would not view *Schindler's List*.)

Metaphors are created to better grasp our multiple experiences and perceptions. We are always moving beyond – *meta ferein* – our simplistic articulation of our lives in the world. We grow, develop, change, have new experiences, face ambiguities meet new people etc. And so we create metaphors in an attempt to seek a unity to our complex lives, albeit an imperfect and temporary unity. The hurley burley and helter skelter of life would easily destroy us were it not for metaphors which grow from our living experiences. In *Imaginative Thinking and Human Existence*, Father Edward L. Murray, C.S.Sp., has beautifully expressed this truth:

Metaphors for a person's life are not mere aesthetic indulgences. They are one's lifelines, hope for success, embodiment of any anticipations of arriving intact. Indeed, when a person in life, like the client in therapy, is able to metaphorize his situation genuinely and imaginatively, or re-metaphorize it anew, it does in fact open up an

understanding, a semantic expansion, and provide one with a clearing, wherein he can get his bearings, steady himself, rest a while, think some things through differently, sketch in broader strokes his upcoming future, and then launch forth into life's thickets a renewed and stronger person. (p. 98)

Recall a good "retreat experience" or even an authentic "Sunday Eucharist" and you will grasp the point.

Following Paul Ricoeur, metaphors are heuristic, interpretive entities. They are powerful, not only in their unifying power, but also in their ability to change us, our language and the reality in which we live. To metaphorize is to become open to change. Metaphors are heuristic fiction which shatter our sense of language and reality so that we can redescribe language and reality. Metaphors shock us into noticing how life and reality cannot be limited to what we have already grasped and understood. Metaphors invite us to imagine ever new possibilities i.e., to create ever new metaphors. We are invited to take an imaginative leap towards a destination even though we haven't taken a single step. We are invited to speak about the unspeakable, because it has now been imagined and entered our horizon of experience. Moreover, we are challenged to perform the undoable, because we have discovered an imaginative way to do it.

Note must be taken of a special type of metaphor, what might be called vital metaphors or root metaphors. These metaphors are corporate cultural metaphors. They express a common cultural event or person which serves as the focal point and norm of meaning and cultural identity. One might think of Jesus' death and resurrection or the Jewish Exodus event as examples of vital or root metaphors. As long as these metaphors exert a positive heuristic power and disclose life as meaningful, even though soaked in ambiguity, a culture will stand strong and steadfast. Should these metaphors fail to open up meaning amid ambiguity, people will turn to alternative metaphors in their search for a

meaningful existence. Consequently, the cultures which stand on the foundation of these root metaphors will shake and eventually crumble. For example, one might wish to argue that Western European and American Culture have moved away from understanding life in terms of Jesus and have adopted the metaphor of wealth and prosperity. Or, one might see women in these cultures as turning away from the Christian metaphor which they perceive as marginalizing and bifurcating their lives. If Christianity does not remetaphorize and find an imaginative path to include them deeply in its life, they will perceive, metaphorize and imagine alternatives outside of its culture and community.

It is now well known that when hurricanes make landfall, they can spawn vicious tornadoes more intense and destructive than the eye of the storm itself. Similarly, metaphors can spawn symbols that have their origins in the metaphor but exert a greater power than metaphors.

The Greek word *symbolein* can be contrasted with the antonym *diabolein*, respectively: thrown together and torn apart, unity and chaos. At its heart, any symbol is involved with presence and more particularly the presence of one entity in and through another entity. Every symbol points to another reality and makes it present without being absolutely identical to it. Symbols are not created. We find symbols. Or better, they find us. But a symbol does not exist out there in life, as a type of brute reality. No, symbols find us in our concrete being-in-the-world-with-others. Symbols appear within the horizon of our perception and in the context of our cultural root metaphors. Some symbols weaken and perish. Despite our noble efforts to preserve them, they grow weary and eventually die, for example, oil as a preservative in technological culture. But certain “depth symbols” appear disease and morbidity resistant. They transcend their cultural origins and history, and perdure across time.

What is it that symbols do? Symbols enhance the dynamic of our human transcendence. Symbols engage us in such a fashion that we grasp the multiple meanings operative in our lives and the interrelatedness of these meanings. In

this way, we reach back into the past and ahead into the future. We plumb more deeply into our earthiness and soar higher into the limitless heavens.

Symbols are not merely objects but also actions or behaviors. When words fail, human beings act, gesture or behave. Human behavior is itself a language, a system for meaningful communication. Actions can speak louder than words. While symbolic behavior possesses greater possibilities than any symbol, it is also more ambiguous and open to distortion, misinterpretation and emptiness.

The human person is truly a symbolic animal. As an embodied spirit, the human person is always a living-with a symbol in symbolic activity. Our bodies are symbols of our self. Our bodies make us present in the world to others and ourselves. When my body acts, I act, since my body cannot undertake human action without the self which it makes present but upon which it is dependent for life. Without the self, the body becomes a corpse. Being a symbolic creature, it is not surprising that the human person lives in a world of symbols and symbolic activities. Attending to this world, the human person is engaged in an extraordinarily rich and complicated field of meanings. The encounter with particular symbols and symbolic activities, stimulates the human imagination and provides it with both direction and focus. Alternatively, other symbols and symbolic activities will push us along a different path. The deeper and more active one's engagement with symbols the greater one's imaginative power.

Let us now offer some comments on that often misunderstood companion of the imagination – myth. Simply stated, myths attempt to tell the truth in a story. These stories are imaginative acts that seek to engage the listener's imagination. Myth frequently encompasses metaphor and symbol within itself, using them to tell its truth. Why myths? Because no matter how strong our uniqueness and differences, there is more that we share in common than that which keeps us apart.

Myths reflect our collective imagination's attempt to deal with universal experiences. Myths tell the truth of what we share in common, our pains and joys, successes and failures, victories and defeats. Above all myths tell from whence we came and to where we are going. They describe the traps and pitfalls which can thwart our pilgrimage and lead us to failure.

While myths are wrapped in time-conditioned language and narrative, they penetrate into perennial questions and truths which mark the road every human person and society must walk. These myths light the way in the darkness, they teach our imaginations so that when we face the Cyclops or Sirens we will already have a clue as to our proper course, a clue given to us by those who have gone before us.

How can we summarize imagination in relationship to perception, metaphor, symbol and myth? Let us say that perception of the world makes us present in it as imaginizers. Metaphor is our imaginative narrative that continually shatters our accepted view and opens us to new imaginative possibilities. Symbolic behavior is imagination made concrete and actually real, imagination embodied. Myth is our collective imagination's most expansive act, seeking to comprehend the whole. When we imaginize, we marshal all our faculties in an attempt to give meaning and make sense, to understand the past, look forward to a future and live in the present.

Now we must ask a key question. From whence the imagination? I would propose that the Judeo-Christian tradition presents the imagination energized or empowered by the Holy Spirit as a gift from the One God. Let us turn now to Scripture to begin developing this thesis. I would suggest that the dynamic process of perception, metaphorizing, symbolizing and mythologizing are dynamically operative in our effort to imagine the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the creative imagination. We are doing what we have described above.

Scripture

The creation stories insist that the origin and meaning of the human person is in God. Before reflecting on the creation of humankind let us ask what exactly it is that God is doing in the narrative. I would suggest that God is portrayed as imaginizing. In the Priestly account, instead of reading “God said and it happened,” one might read the text: “God imagined and it became real.” All the different created realities share in a key attribute of this God, they are good. However, on the sixth day God imagines in a special way. God’s imaginative power draws inspiration from self-perception, “let us make the human in our own image and likeness.” The result is an imaginative reality called the human, which will have the capacity to symbolize the imaginative God, speak narratives and create myths. This human is male and female. In their dynamic togetherness and complementarity, they are symbols of God’s imagination. They are to multiply and fill the earth. These human activities continue God’s imaginative creative actions. They become collaborators forming an imaginative community which brings new lives into a world who will participate in making meaning, attaining understanding and journeying into a future in whose construction they actively collaborate.

What makes humankind symbols of God? I believe a clue is given in a Christian reading of the Yahwist creation narrative. God blows life into the nostrils and “the man” comes alive. The Spirit, God’s breath, stirs up life in the man. Divine life, spirit-filled life sustains our true humanness.

God sets forth the rules of the garden, barring Adam only from two trees. God brings forth various playmates for the man but none sparks his imagination. The other living creatures do not share his imagination. Man is the sole creaturely imaginer. He is alone until God creates woman. Seeing her body, the living symbol of herself, the man imagines her to be human because she images God to him.

We know what follows, the fascinating story of the fall and resulting human estrangement. Let us suggest that sin, whether the first sin or any sin, is rooted in a distorted imagination. In sinning, we use our imaginative godliness to pursue a path which leads away from God. We imagine ourselves as self-sufficient meaning makers who can interpret the present and create a future apart from God.

Not only does distorted imaginizing lead us away from God, but we, by necessity journey away from each other. We create a world of estrangement and discord, where human beings slay one another. Ultimately, all human existence is in disarray. Our perceptions, metaphors, narratives and myths work towards a dissolution of discourse and we babble in our own fantasized godliness and disfigured greatness.

Genesis affirms the godly nature of humankind and the human imagination as its keenest expression and realization. At the same time, Genesis relates the diabolical possibilities which can emerge from a misuse of this godly gift, when imagination is exercised apart from God and only for one's vain self glory. One might read the story of salvation as a drama of restoring human imagination to its proper focus and creativity, i.e., to the understanding of life and the creating of meaning in relationship to God, to creating cultures which do not babble and baffle, but prophesy, preach and live the true origin, depth and sacred meaning of human communal life as the symbolic realization of the divine imagination's rootedness in divine communal life. Let us recall various important actors in this imaginative drama and see the creative imagination at work under the impulse of the Spirit.

In the Old Testament, we can point to Moses and the Prophets. All were filled with the Spirit of Yahweh. They perceived alternatives. They proposed new or renewed ways of behaving. They appealed to the great symbols, narratives and myths of the Jewish people (even those borrowed and modified from surrounding nations), all to alter the situations of slavery, whether it be a slavery of captivity, occupation or

sin. These imaginizers were not always loved by their people. Imagination can often bring a type of solitary confinement and shunning. Yet, their imaginations were fixed on God, there imaginations were sustained by God's spirit. They were able to articulate possibilities and hope for a future that made growth, change and even suffering worthwhile not worthless. In its root the message of the imaginizers of the Old Testament is remarkably the same: Be who God made you to be; fulfill your great destiny; together, moved by God's Spirit, imagine and through your imaginations create the world of justice, peace and love God intended.

The New Testament is rampant with great imaginizers, Jesus holding first place. Jesus imagines his identity, his core self, to be that of the Son of the Father. His imagination gives rise to a consciousness of a special and unique mission in the world which totally consumes him and his relationships.

What reason is present to explain this conscious, knowledge and mission? Very simply, the Spirit of the Lord is upon him and the Spirit of the Lord leads him on his journey. Jesus' perception, symbolic actions and metaphors are sustained by this Spirit-filled imagination. He is able to understand not only the law but the intention of its creator. He is able to explain how those apparently on the fringes of institutional Judaism might be imagined as first in the Kingdom of God. He is able to imagine a life of poverty, justice, simplicity, persecution, rejection and death as a blessing. He imagines loving ones enemies as a divine command. This is truly radical imaginizing, the type of imaginizing that might cost one one's life.

Mary, Jesus' mother, was perhaps the most Spirit-filled disciple imaginizer. Only a deeply Spirit-filled imaginizer could even unthematically comprehend being called to give birth to a savior whose father was God. Only a deeply Spirit-filled imaginizer could imagine her son rectifying the poor wedding planning which resulted in an embarrassing wine shortage. Only a deeply Spirit-filled imaginizer could

be the faithful disciple and Mater Dolorosa at the foot of the cross, watching her son die, yet not losing hope.

The Spirit was deep in Mary. Wherever Mary is, one finds the Spirit acting: at Jesus conception, at the visit to Elizabeth, at the Temple, at the cross, and in the room with the Apostles when the Spirit gives new birth to an imaginative community whose language is no longer babble but meaningful discourse understood by all who hear. Her consistent and persistent “yes” typifies what a spirit-filled imagination will accomplish for one’s self and others. Mary, ever-Virgin is, paradoxically, an inexhaustible font of fecundity.

Peter, the Beloved Disciple and Paul shared a profound imaginative insight and proclamation: Jesus who had died is alive and has breathed his Spirit among us. In the great Christian narrative, these three represent different dimensions of the Christian meta-narrative and its imaginative foundation. Peter represents an institutional imagination, or what can be called tradition. The Beloved Disciple represents a loving imagination, or what can be called charisma. Paul represents a kerygmatic imagination or what can be called evangelization. Each imaginative form is crucial to the imaginative Christian community and complements the others.

It appears that all the faithful servants of Yahweh, Jesus and the disciples of the Lord shared a Spirit-filled imagination. On the other hand, those who would not relent and persisted in sin refused to imagine, metaphorize and symbolize empowered by the Spirit. Their imaginations were flooded with a false self-interest. They could not imagine that only faithful suffering and death could make real life, eternal life, a reality.

Let us now restate our thesis and offer some brief suggests for further explorations and investigations. The thesis is simple. Imagination makes us human. Imagination makes possible critical reason, emotion, intuition and volition, and offers a possible synthetic ground where we can constructively interact and be mutually embellished.

The imagination, then, is the ground of our humanness. From a theological vantage point, it can be argued that the image of God in which we are all created finds its deepest symbolic presence in us in our imaginations come alive with the Spirit.

Finally I would offer two suggestions, hopefully, imaginative suggestions. First, I would propose a twofold reflection on culture. We need to imagine the collapse of Enlightenment culture in the West (Modernism) and embrace the valuable elements of a legitimate Postmodernism. Autonomous reason, logics, self-sufficiency and self-finality have created an empty, lonely culture of depression, dread and despair. The West has suffered a loss of imagination and with it a diminishing of human worth and dignity. We have created a culture of the death-solution, witnessed in the millions of abortions, the unthinkable rise of suicides among our youth, the growing cohorts of children raised by one parent, the increase in youth crime, the growth of poverty, and the willingness to end life among the elderly and infirmed. When the imagination is shackled and imprisoned or lulled into a coma, the ground for hope and life is lost. Postmodernism can be a potential ally in transforming this culture of death. It debunks the impoverished myth of disinterested autonomous reason and individualism. It values emotion, intuition and imagination as well as reasonable thinking as interactive pathways to meaning and ethical behavior. Moreover, Postmodernism recovers the fundamental truth of our solidarity, our human community. The church must enliven an imagination of hope and life in our ever-darkening world. This can become real only when Christians undertake imaginative acts of love: love of those who injure us, love of the abandoned and outcast, love of the poor, love of all our neighbors. Only the Spirit can sustain this kind of imagining – witnessed in the saints to whose ranks we are all nobly called.

We also need to apply imaginative thinking to the issue surrounding cultural pluralism. More specifically, the West

and the church of the West need to imagine how it can be transformed, enriched and embellished by non-Western cultures. Once again, I think we Westerners should more deeply imagine the communal character of our existence, the “we” preceding the “I,” which seems to be an unconscious principle of existence and thought in these cultures.

Second, the reclaiming of Christian imaginative thinking and acting awaits the renewal of worship. Liturgical reform is only a prelude to liturgical renewal and never its substitute. Liturgy should engage our perception, metaphorizing, symbolizing and mythologizing to a degree which surpasses all our other experiences. We desperately need imaginative liturgies.

Liturgies, wherein, through the power of the imagination we really experience the risen Lord, present in the Spirit who fashions us into our most real selves. Imaginative liturgies are marked by surprise. Not the surprise of confused prayers, flashy vestments, serendipitous structures and the like. The surprise is that God the Spirit finds us, the poor, the lame, the beggars, the sinners, men and women, the doubters – even the theologians – and brings us to Jesus the risen Lord so that Father may look on us and call us son and daughter. This is the surprise of imaginative love. This is God’s imaginative thinking. It was powerful enough to create us. It is powerful enough to sustain us. It will be powerful enough to save us. Imaginative liturgies are a small light in a very dark world, but this tiny imaginative light has more right to glow than the lugubrious darkness.

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